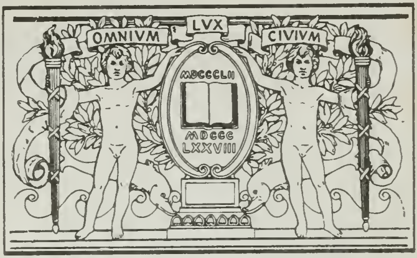
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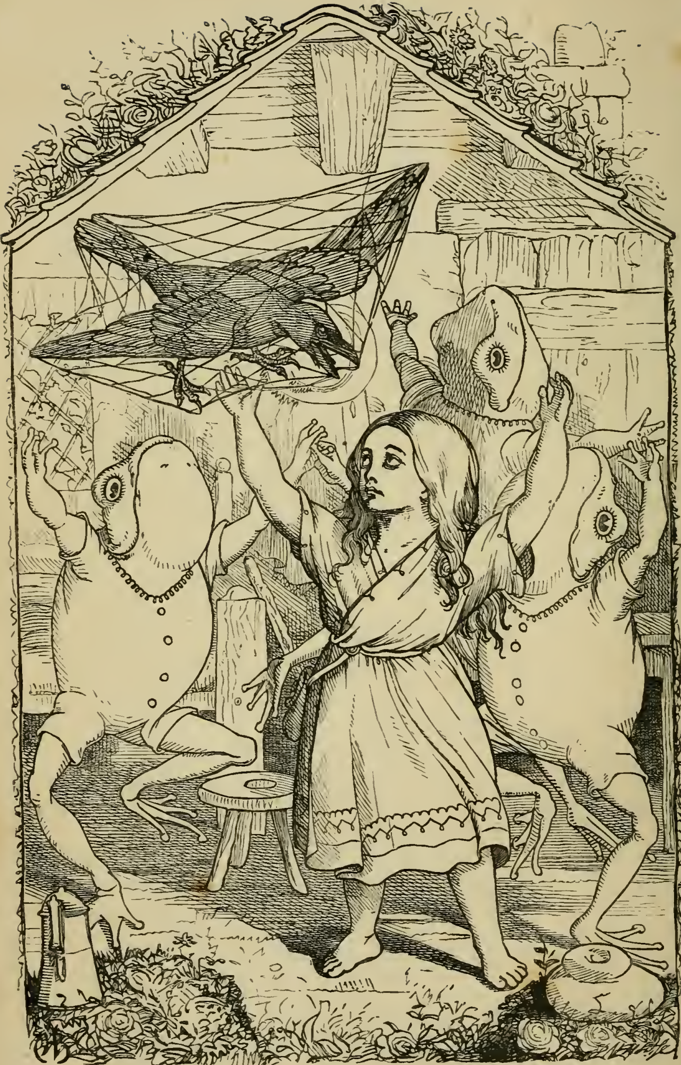

Melilot and the Fairies.

THE CHICKEN MARKET

AND OTHER FAIRY TALES

no. a c
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no subj c. (Fairy tales)

BY

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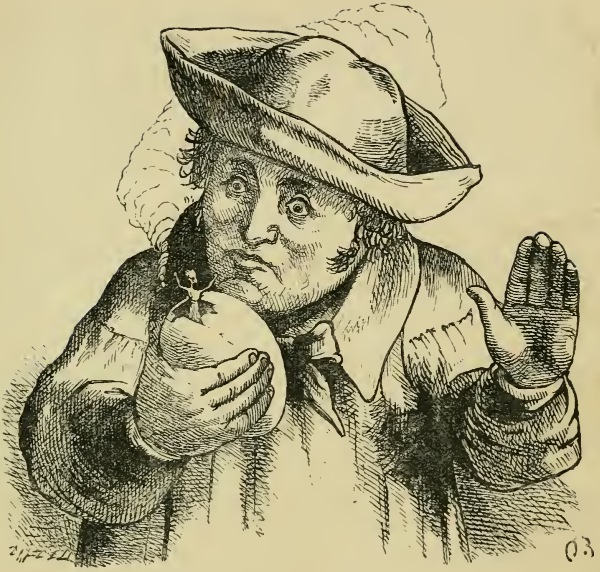


THE CHICKEN MARKET.

CHAPTER I.

BEN ODY IS RESOLVED ON CARRYING HIS CHICKENS TO A PRETTY MARKET.

Once upon a time there was a rustic whose name was Ben Ody, and he knew more of what is in an egg than that it is something good to eat. He understood how one thing comes out of another. Ben Ody, when he had no more sense than the rest of the world, kept fowls; and when he grew to be so wise, he had been carrying his chickens to a pretty market.

There is a woody wilderness in Dulmansland, and few reach to the heart of it; but there is open market held by Fairies in the middle of that wilderness, and any man who gets to it may talk and traffic with the market-people to his own great gain. Ben Ody knew that there was such a market, and resolved to carry thither a large basketful of chickens.

Goody Madge Ody cried down his design. Chickens, she said, were worth three shillings a couple in their own good town of Peniworth, and that was their just price all the world over. He might grind down his legs from under him in travelling to the strange market, and find, she would answer for it, nobody but a fool to pay a shilling more. Ben Ody made answer to his wife that she talked like a woman, and then set out like a man upon his journey.

He had not gone ten steps from his door before he met somebody who offered him four shillings a pair for all his chickens. But Goodman Ben refused the money, saying to himself, one has not to go far to find a fool. He had not gone ten miles before he met somebody who offered for his chickens four shillings apiece. Should he halt on his way to Fairy-land because he was tempted by so great a certainty of present gain? Ody covered up the basket with his pocket-handkerchief, and travelled on. The very chickens cried "Cheap! cheap!" to one another when the bargain was proposed. "I hope for better luck than that," said Ody, as he went his way. A forward young hen who was of the company in the basket, getting her head, after a little perseverance, through one of the holes in her master's handkerchief, turned one eye up at him, and clucked, "Luck! luck! luck! Ha!" He could not tell whether she spoke in sympathy or in derision. For, to the last, wise as he became, Ben Ody could not arrive at the whole and exact mind even of a hen.

On the first night of his journey, Goodman Ben, when he came to an inn, supped upon juicy steak with oyster sauce, and bought wheat for his poultry. On the second night he had cold shoulder, and fed the chickens upon bran. On the third night he had sour milk for supper, and a very little bread, of which he gave all to his birds. Should he halt on his way to Fairy-land because he was repelled by so great a certainty of present hunger? On the fourth night he supped at a pig-trough, and slept in a barn, upon the floor of which his hens found pickings. On the fifth night he came to the sea-coast, where a keen wind, blustering from the east, cruelly threatened to cut off his nose and ears. The wild waves champed on the restraining bit of shore, tossing abroad white flakes of foam. Behind the flying foam-flakes the wind raced, like a starved hound, whining. There was rough water stirring eagerly, flashing white lines, reflecting from the tempestuous sky, just quitted by the sun, a ghastly yellow light. But in the west, water and air were heavy with the purple gloom that buried all, and was not to be cloven even by the stroke of all the lightnings in it. Who could tell when it was from the wind, when from the wave, when from the cloud, that thunder came? In that fierce tumult a man's ears were stuffed with the incessant roar, his eyes filled with the rising of great waters, and the rising also of their own small flood, under pinch of the wind that had a grip on every nerve. The tongue within the mouth was salted, and all juices of the flesh seemed to be brine. A driving rain began to whip the Goodman in the face. No shelter was to be had in the low red crags behind him, or on the flat, treeless land above. Beyond a gap in the cliffs, far away by a white sea-mark, a boat-house could be seen. But there was between the drenched man and that mockery of shelter a wide wet bog and the estuary of a river.

Then fell upon his mind's ear the voice of his Goody who talked like a woman, and upon his mind's eye a vision of the market-place of Peniworth that was now left, a five days' journey, behind his back. The chickens all were become cheerless—cold fowls without tongue. Ben Ody had their basket by this time under his gaberdine, that dripped and flapped over them, a dismal substitute for the warm mother's wing, under which they still could remember how they once were nursed.

Suddenly, through the splashing of the rain, light shone from their owner's countenance. Sore hunger, prompter of his wit, reminded him that he knew, as every man may know, one sentence, at least, of the speech of hens. The hint given him from the basket at the outset of his journey, which it had then suited his humour to consider English, belonged naturally to one of the languages of the great Poultry Stock, and was, in fact, Hennish for "I am about to lay an egg." "Where," he cried, in his stomach, "is that egg? For eggs are good to eat, and I am desperately hungry." There was a flutter in the basket, followed by a delicate rap on his elbow. Was that a mouse running down his sleeve? The egg was in his hand. "Pah!" said the countryman; "the egg's alive! It can't be eatable." But Ben Ody put the two ends of the egg to his lips, and found one cold, the other hot. Right enough! he thought. So he made for himself a hole in the small end, sucked thereat, and was nearly choked before he knew that what he swallowed was tobacco-smoke. What wonder? Again and again had he prophesied to Goody, and said, "Goody, we shall have the poultry copying the puppies, and the chickens will soon learn to smoke before they break the shell." How this young embryo came by his cigars was only one out of a thousand mysteries of the tobacco trade.

Ben Ody peeped into the egg-shell, and the smoke immediately stung him in the eye. He might as well hope to look down a chimney when fresh wood has been laid on the fire below. Meantime, the wind howled and the sea roared in his ears, the rain lashed his face, and the salt spray leaped into his mouth as his teeth chattered with cold. The tobacco-smoke curled up from the egg like the smoke of a fusee that has burnt close to another sort of shell. "Next only to victuals comes tobacco," sighed the weary man. "After you, therefore, if you please, my little chicken!" A wisp of dead herbage was blowing by, and a bit of stout reed in it caught Ben's attention. "I will have you," he thought, "for a pipe-stem;" and, accordingly, he thrust one end of it through a convenient part of the shell. Immediately a venerable head, as big as an old pea, as yellow and as wrinkled, but having as much white beard as a dozen dandelion seeds, thrust itself from inside through a hole of its own breaking, and cried, "How many more draughts are you going to expose me to, young man?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," Ben Ody said. "You are no chicken!"

"Why are you standing out there in the rain?" said the little man, still in a rage. "How much damp are you going to bring in with you? Now then, the supper will get cold, as well as you!"

Whether he himself had become smaller, or the egg had become larger, Ben could not then tell, for he had no point of comparison as he stood there in the tempest, with his face towards the boundless sea. Moreover, he was a man on such terms with himself, that in the most reduced condition he could not feel small. He could not, indeed, fail to perceive that his chicken-basket towered high above his head, its wicker sides rising like columns of a temple, in which there were enshrined sublime hens and a cock holding his head higher than any weather-cock in Dulmansland. But, ah! what a fine lime-whited hermitage, tapestried inside from dome to floor with the most exquisite of tissues, was the vaulted chamber he had taken for an egg. Therein sat the yellow man, and by no means a little man, beside a fire hot enough to have parched his pea of a head (which now seemed to be as big as a ripe pumpkin), and there he knocked out the dead ashes from his pipe before he turned his chair round to the supper-table. The rain splashed and the wind howled outside, while the wide dome that sheltered them rocked like a great ship in the storm. For supper there was a bee's thigh stewed in its own burden of honey; and Ben Ody was so hungry, that he ate slice after slice, and feasted on the honey till his clothes began to feel too tight for him. "Now," said the yellow hermit, "my name's Yolk. You are my guest, sir, and I am your servant. What dew do you take?" Here he produced two round bottles from a cupboard, each warranted to hold an exact unbroken dew-drop. "This," he said, "is Thistledew, and this has been distilled on Woodbine Blossom." Then Yolk broke the seal of one bottle carefully, produced a couple of cups, and shared with his guest a drop of Thistledew, at which they drank and drank, till prudence counselled them to leave a little in the bottle. Ody hardly knew what he had been talking about, so much had the dew risen to his head, when at last his servant became angry, and began to beat the table, shouting again and again, "Shut your hand firmly upon what you want, and there you have it!" Then Ben Ody shut his hand, and there were barleycorns forcing their way out between his fingers. He shut both his hands firmly, opened them side by side, so that he made a scoop of his two palms, and the scoop was at once full to overflowing of good barley. Then he knew that what he had been arguing about was supper for his fowls, and he went out to feed them.

CHAPTER II.

OVER THE SEA.

THE storm was over, though the sea raged still against the land, but no star shone. The moon, breaking for an instant through a rift in the clouds, made the wet, glistening shore so light, that one of his colossal chickens, having spied the Goodman as he clambered up the side of a great pebble, mistook him for a grub, and being peckish, made a snap at him. "You would not," said Yolk, laughing at Ben's escape, "have been the first man eaten up by his own chickens when travelling this way to market. You have held to your mind with them, and they are your own. Treasure them. Golden eggs are a mere goose's business to the eggs they lay. But they may eat you up, nevertheless. We are yours; yet have a care, Master Ben Ody. You are ours."

"Dear Mr. Yolk, what must I do?"

"Go on."

"Through the sea, I suppose?"

"Certainly, through the sea. This is the Sea of Trouble, through which you must go, unless you will return to Peniworth."

"But here is every hen as large as a parsonage, and a cock bigger than our parish church. I might well leave them alone to find their suppers. If they grow at this rate, nothing smaller than a sea-serpent will be the worm that any one of them will scratch for. What ship is to carry them?"

"There is no ship to carry them," said Yolk.

"Ah! very well. To fowls of that size the sea is a puddle. But, for myself, where am I to find a little skiff—a mere cock-boat—what if it were but an egg-shell?" and Ben cast a wistful look upon the hermitage.

"Go on," said Yolk. "I only stay behind to let the fowls out of the basket. You may trust us all to follow."

"The night is pitch-dark, Mr. Yolk. The sea and the wind are buffeting and tearing at each other. Here is the tide rising, and a wave at its first innings has almost bowled me down." For a minute there escaped a ray of moonlight from the storm above; it fled like a white spirit, and vanished suddenly across the waste of surging waters. Under its touch, there had flashed into sight, pale and still, the tall figure of Yolk, with one arm raised, and a long finger pointing seaward.

"Courage, Ben Ody! Dare and overcome! Turn neither to the right nor to the left. Go on resolved, and you will reach the Fairy Market."

The rustic put faith in the exhortation, and his heart enlarged within him. "Shut your hand firmly upon what you want, and there you have it!"

"Courage!" Ben Ody cried, with both fists clenched, beating the waves back as they struck him on the brow. He was among them, and his large tread became heavy on the corals of the sea-bottom as his frame grew to the measure of his grand audacity.

Sharks leaping about him, worried him as fleas worry a dog. Great whales gathered in shoals, and joined their forces in wild rushes at his legs. As well might earwigs hope to trip the heels of a prize-fighter.

"Mr. Yolk," said Ody, when they were half-way across, "it seems to me that this is pretty night-work for a man whose supper was but a few slices out of a bee's leg and half a dew-drop."

"It is getting to be all spirit with you, Mr. Ody," said the man out of the egg. "Your courage is not of the sort they cut up with a knife and fork. Starvation strengthens it. There is meat enough in a bee's leg to give mettle to the man who is resolved. So here we are, safe out of deep water, and sure-footed among the shallows. This rain is but the earth's morning wash; for there, you see, rises the sun over the sand-hills."

"Well," Ody said, "I have had my wash, and now, if I could only polish myself with a towel, give my hair a handsome combing, and brush my old smock and boots and gaiters into something fit to be looked at ——"

"Look! look! look! here!" clucked a voice behind him.

"That's the voice of the speckled hen, I know," said Ben, turning upon her. "Speckled! Why, Yolk, are these my chickens? Was that sea a beauty bath?"

Though a humming-bird grew to the size of an ostrich, and increased as much in beauty as in size, it would be no match for one of Ben Ody's chickens as those chickens now shone down the dawn. They had crossed the water, and stood glittering among the dull sand-hills like hillocks of rainbow in the morning rain.

"Three shillings a couple, did you say, Madge? And that glorious being yonder," whispered the rustic, "is my speckled hen, for it is she who has demeaned herself to lay me an egg for my breakfast. Here it is." But as Goodman Ody took it up, the shell broke in his hand, and there fell out of it a small clothes-brush, a comb, and a large towel. When Ben Ody rubbed his face dry with this towel, soft and delicate as any spider's web, though stronger than chain-cable, the wrinkles and the freckles and the stubble of his beard came away with the water. His crooked nose, kneaded up in it for a moment, became as the nose of an Apollo, and his old mouth blossomed again with its early roses. He dug the comb into his hair, and shook out exquisite odours while he pulled the grizzled mat into brown silken tresses. He brushed at his smock, his boots, and his gaiters, clearing away all that was rustic as he rubbed. The smock brushed out into a purple velvet robe, enriched with a fine gold embroidery and fringed with amethysts. The gaiters, when their shell of dirt had been cleared off, displayed an inner crust of diamonds, and the old hobnail boots, which, with the feet inside, were filed down by one minute's brushing to a dainty size and shape, cleaned into easy slippers of rich orange morocco with red heels. At the same time there came a sensation of silk and fine linen over the entire body and legs of Mr. Ody.

"Now, Master, that you have done polishing yourself," said Yolk, "will you oblige me with the brush and towel?"

Yolk cleaned himself into the figure of a black-haired page, in a full suit of amber satin. Still there was a touch of bile in his complexion, but his face was smooth, and the long white bristles of his beard had shrunk into a tender down upon the chin. Upon his upper lip the towel left only a slender black moustache of hair that might be in the very first month of its crispness.

"There's nothing," he said, "so refreshing as a good rub with a towel, when one has been hard at work all night."

"Except breakfast," observed my Lord Ben. "Towels and combs and yellow pages are all very well, but my intention was to eat that egg."

"Shut your hand firmly upon what you want, and there you have it! Call for what breakfast you please, Master."

"Oh, certainly. A pint of old ale and a muffin! There, Yellow Page! The muffin is for you—the ale for me."

"May I be permitted to suggest, that if I had as much might in my hands as you in yours, I should know how to choose myself a better breakfast."

"Throw the muffin to the fowls, if you don't like it. Stay, I beg your pardon for remembering old ways. At Peniworth I had my morning draught, and Madge, she had her muffin. Hold that muffin for a minute, and keep it as hot as you can, while I shut my hand upon my Goody. There, I have her!" With her mob-cap and her false red wig; her tortoiseshell spectacles; her turn-up nose and the one front-tooth in her mouth; with her old flowered gown tucked up about her waist, and a black petticoat flapping over the wrinkles in her grey worsted stockings; with her feet raised upon pattens, her bare shrivelled arms still wet to the elbows with soapsuds, and a dripping lump of mottled soap in her right hand, while her left hand slipped greasily out of her husband's grasp—there stood Goody Madge.

"Let me give you a rub, Goody, with this towel."

"I'll have no spiders' webs thrust in my mouth. Keep off, I say! None of your play-acting with me."

"After only a week's parting, do you not remember Ben again? Have I not been fighting alone through my trouble, and do I not give you my hand now I am fairly through that sea, and safe to find my way into the Fairy Chicken Market?"

"My Ben certainly left Peniworth on a fool's errand with a basketful of chickens. But if you are he, you've altered greatly for the worse. What other sign am I to know you by?"

"The morning muffin!"

"And that morning draught, I see! But who's the boy?"

"He is the yellow boy who waits upon me."

"What have you done with the hens?"

"Look yonder. What do you think of them? Three shillings a couple in our market-place, and if I take them farther, I shall only find a fool to pay a shilling more?"

"Nonsense, Ben. Fine feathers don't make fine fowl. How will they roast?"

"They glorify me, they give power to my hands, they give me back more than my youth, they grow without food, they are the delight of my eyes; and am I, because in our old market-place nothing but bread and meat is bartered for, to wring their necks and sell them for the pot?"

"Alack! alack! alack! Yah!" cried a voice from the sand-heaps.

"That is the black hen's voice," said Mrs. Margery. "I'll go look for her egg."

CHAPTER III.

THROUGH WASTE AND WILDERNESS.

The light rain had passed away, and mist was rolling from the earth as the sun rose. Yolk laid a hand on Ody's wrist, and drawing close to him, looked with an awed face landward. On the verge of the land, where the last blades of coarse grass were waving in the sea-wind, the outline visible against the sky was indistinctly broken by the gleam of some white ruined gravestones and the swelling up of graves. A heavy mist was rolling upward from that undefended graveyard on the border of the sea. Within the mist, and part of it, were solemn shapes that spread themselves abroad—the shapes of ghostly grave-diggers, each with a black mattock in his hand.

"They are gone, Master. I saw them sitting on the shore watching for us."

"For us?"

"Go up, Master, and see those graves. They are all marked with plain stones; not a name ever was carved on one of them. Here the storm beats and the lichen grows. This head-stone was beaten down upon its grave when the blast of the night wind shrieked over the forgotten dead. They were all wrecked men whom the ghosts have buried, working silently and leaving not a trace beyond the hillock and a head-stone such as these."

Goodman Ody shivered. "This hole in the sand was made for me, no doubt, and I observe now that the shore is lined with heaps of chicken-bone."

"Many a man," said Yolk, "carrying his chickens to the Fairy Market, has been taken dead out of this Sea of Trouble. When the resolve falters in the midst of peril, all is lost. Every man cannot shut his hand firmly upon what he wants. That young husband, upon whose grave the fallen stone lies heavy, had the fondest heart alive. He flinched and died when the salt wave reminded him of tears of little children on his cheek."

Then, as he picked a bunch of wormwood from this grave, there came upon Ben Ody's ear the voice of his Goody, crying, "Come down, man! Here's the black hen's egg; only she isn't black, and a pretty egg it is for your fine feathers to lay. It's empty!"

"Stop," answered the Goodman; "stop till I come. Now, crack that egg, and you shall see what you shall see come out of it. Well, Goody, what is it?"

"My wedding-ring," said the old dame; "and that is curious. When you were three days away, I was vexed at you, and took it off, and put it away in a teapot. How it came here—how I came here—how you came to be so foolish—what has come to the chickens—who that young man is—and what's coming to us all, who knows?"

"Never mind, Margery; put out your finger, and on goes the ring again. Is there any spell in it, I wonder, Mr. Yolk? How do you feel now, Madge?"

"I feel like sticking by you, Ben."

"Then may the black hen lay nothing but wedding-rings, and may I be the jeweller that sells them. On we go. My love's as old as yours, Goody, although the matter of the chickens puts a difference between us. You'd shine like a queen if you would only scrub your face well with this towel."

"I'm Goody Madge, and I don't wish to be transmogrified."

"Then, Goody, you shall not even put your pattens off. So take my arm, old woman, and come on."

The forward road lay through a vast sandy plain, filled with rabbit-holes. The fowls, glittering with all colours that play in the diamond, led the way, and were as a rainbow of hope moving before them. Ben Ody, beautiful in his new youth, walked lovingly with his old wife, who, having shaken down her flounced gown, had wiped her arms upon her apron, put the bit of mottled soap into her pocket, and was carrying her pattens in her hand. She did not care about the splendour of his newly-gotten youth; he did not care about her wrinkles and grey hairs. The bells had rung for them both, years ago, from Peniworth church-steeple. There was one memory, one heart between them. Yolk described the road. "These," he said, "were the famous warrens of Mockery on the confines of Dulmansland." Ben was pleased with the ways of the little rabbits that ran out of their holes to nibble and make mouths at him. They were so free with Goody's heel, that she put on her pattens again to protect her toes from their incessant nibbling. They were thus bold because they saw her dread of them; Ben Ody's slippers were proof against all their bites. Shrubs became numerous, in which venomous snakes hissed as they passed. Trees multiplied, and, following their chickens, the wayfarers soon were buried in the great Forest or Wilderness of Doubt.

"By the straight path, on and be resolved," Yolk whispered. Everywhere there was to be heard the roaring of a lion round the corner, but none ever leapt out to dispute the forward way. As the forest darkened, and the night set in, and the moon threw only a stray spear-shaft of light among the trees, Goody said, under her breath: "I go where you go, Ben; but I have heard laughter at men who took their chickens to a pretty market, and I have some fear of what it means."

Ben answered with a brave word, crushed the bunch of wormwood in his hand, and steadily went on.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MARKET REACHED.

"Did you see that, Ben?"

"Yes; what was it?"

"Flash of eyes! There are queer people about us in the wood, and they make no sound. One of them ran against me, and walked through me, and could not be felt. Hark, Ben! What voice is that?"

"The nightingale."

"Oh, husband! I wish we were well through the wood."

"That's a bold cock of ours to blow his clarion against the nightingale," said Ben. "There is a distant answer. Trumpet music, that comes nearer and nearer. There's a chorus coming with it. Hark, old girl, hark to the words! We must be getting to our journey's end."

"Make way through the press, Oh yes! Oh yes!
To the never despairing, the manfully daring,
Market is open, Oh yes! Oh yes!"

Then, under the gloomy forest-paths, the chickens all began to shine with their own light. The wood was full of spirit lamps, for every lamp was a Fairy. The glorious procession was seen coming onward like the miracle of a bright sunbeam in the midst of night. There was no light but that which issued from the robes and beaming faces of the Fairies.

On each side of the path the Fairies stood in treble line, face over face. Behind and above these keepers of the way, among the trees and on the trees, a frolicsome crowd made with its happiness a wall of light that shone reflected from Ben Ody, in his royal purple, and Madge, in her figured cotton gown. Hemmed in by Fairy faces, of which every one looked lovingly upon her Ben, a little dazzled by the light, a little troubled with embarrassment about her pattens, the Goody took a firm grip of her husband's arm, and happily marched on.

That path led to the open space of the great Fairy Market, which is hemmed in by the dark Forest of Doubt. The moon stood over it large and round, but the whole market was filled in part with its own emerald light from the robes of the Fairies, in part with the white and rosy radiance of their faces, and the glitter of a crowd of eyes brighter than stars that cluster in the milky-way.

Goody Madge was beset by praises of her chickens, and her heart warmed at the sound of merry traffic from fragrant alcoves cut out of the forest. She felt no more concern about her pattens. Nobody heeded them, and yet it seemed that everybody heeded her and her Goodman.

"What shall I give you for those chickens, mortal dame?" a busy Elf asked of the Goody.

"Three shillings a couple, Madam, was their price at Peniworth, but——"

"Shillings! what are shillings, you dear friend—

"Wit or beauty, troth to duty,
Strength to conquer or obey,
Heart to give well, soul to live well,
Such alone is Fairies' pay."

"That's a funny sort of money," said old Madge, almost in rhyme.

Then another Fairy whispered: "Don't be eager. Bide your time."

Goodman Ben Ody spoke with Yolk, and then began to sing:

"All the fowls that hither we bring,
Body and legs, liver and wing,
We mean to present to the Fairy King."

Then there was more music and more chorusing, and, in the middle of the market-place, Oberon, who descended in form of a moonbeam, became visibly present on a bed of night-flowers there laid for him. The burden of the chorus changed when in a ring of dancing light the Fairies stood about the royal couch and fixed their eyes upon Ben Ody and his wife, as they were left alone together in the great space opposite the King.

"To you he descends; you are his friends.
To the never despairing, the manfully daring,
Oberon speaks and the world attends."

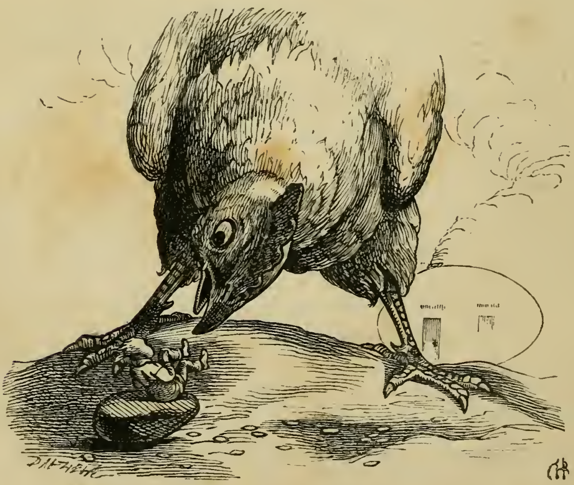
"Your chickens shall come into my barn-yard, Goodman Ody," said the King. "What shall I give you more than thanks for them?"

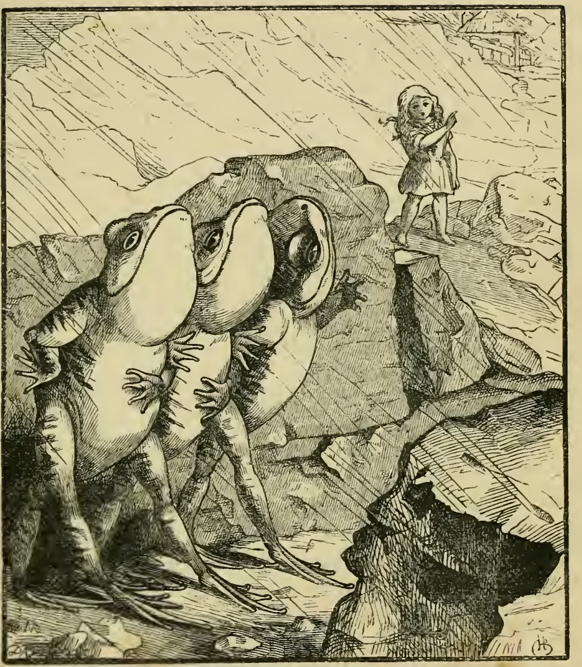
"Only your hand to kiss," Ben stammered.

The circle of the Fairies closed in on the Goodman and his wife, as Oberon stretched forth his royal hand. Ben stood erect when he had kissed it; erect even when he saw the Fairy King rise from his couch, and bending reverently over it, himself kiss the brown, wrinkled hand of the old Goody.

"Goodman Ben Ody," said his Majesty, "you that have kissed the hand of Oberon, are minded to go back to Peniworth and dig with a new strength in your own farm. Out of the fulness of your heart as of your hand, you will deal wisely, liberally, gently, with your fellows. The wiser you become, the better will you feel why Oberon paid homage to your faithful wife. Dame Margery requires none of your Fairy lore. Look down, fortunate husband, into the old eyes under her spectacles, and learn to read in them the greater mysteries of a good woman's soul."

Margery's hand shook, and her pattens clicked together, as she heard these fine things said about herself. It was odd that they should make her think of her lame youngest boy, the cowherd, and a great deal more curious that he should take that very time to pull the bobbin and come limping in over the stone floor of her kitchen. Never before was known such easy travelling as the return from Oberon's court into the old house-place. Ben, in his usual smock, and with the usual freckles and wrinkles, was only fetching his spade out of the tool-house. But there had been no dreaming. The chickens were gone, and, in a suit of corduroy, a fair-sized ploughboy, with a face yellow and seamed as an old pea, there was Yolk smoking his pipe in the chimney-corner.





MELILOT.

CHAPTER I.

THE THREE NEIGHBOURS OF MELILOT.

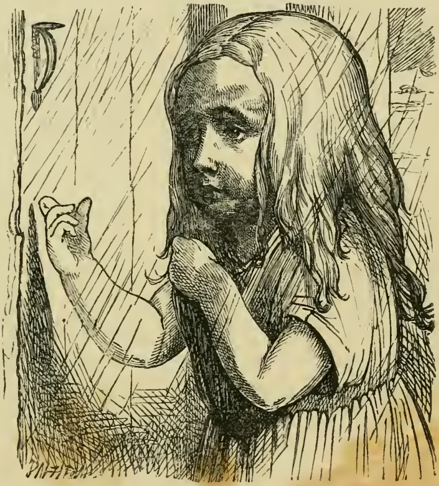
It had been raining for ten months, and everybody felt as if it had been raining for ten years. In the driest part of the country, in the driest corners of the driest houses, there was damp. Whoever came near a fire began to steam; whoever left the fire began to moisten as the damp entered the clothes. There was a breath of wet on everything in-doors, and Melilot was wet through when she came to the door of a broken-roofed cottage that stood in a marsh between two lakes.

Melilot was a pretty girl of twelve, who had lived in a cottage up the mountains, as the only child of hard-working parents, who taught her all that was good, and whose one worldly good she was; for they had nothing to eat but what they could force to grow out of a stony patch of ground upon the mountain-side. They had loved Melilot, and they loved each other. To feed their little one they had deprived themselves, till when the rain running down the mountain-side had washed away their little garden crops, first the mother died—for she it was who had denied herself the most—and then the father also died in a long passion of weeping. The nearest neighbours occupied the cottage in the valley on the marsh between the lakes. In hunger and grief, therefore, Melilot went down to them to ask for human help.

From Melilot's home it was a long way up to the peak of the mountains, and a long way down to the marshy valley in which lay the two lakes with a narrow spit of earth between them, and a black rocky mountain overhanging them upon the other side. A gloomy defile, between high rocks, led out of the valley on the one side, and on the other side it opened upon a waste of bog, over which the thick mist brooded, and the rain now fell with never-ending plash.

The runlets on the mountain formed a waterfall that, dashing over a smooth wall of rock, broke into foam on the ragged floor of a great rocky basin near Melilot's cottage door. Then after a short rush, seething and foaming down a slope rugged with granite boulders, the great cataract fell with a mighty roar over another precipice upon the stream that, swollen by the rains almost into a river, carried its flood into one of the lakes. It was partly by this waterfall that the path down into the valley ran.

Melilot knew that her father, when alive, had avoided the people in the lake cottage, and had forbidden her, although they were the only neighbours, to go near their dwelling. But her father now was dead, and her mother was dead, and there was need of human help if she would bury them. Her father, too, had told her that when she was left helpless she would have to go out and serve others for her daily bread. To what others than these could the child look? So by the stony side of the stream, and by the edge of the lake, her only path in the marsh, Melilot came down shivering and weeping through the pitiless rain, and knocked at the door of the lake cottage.



"Who's that?" asked a hoarse voice inside.

"That's Melilot from up above us," said a hoarser voice

"Come in then, little Melilot," another voice said, that was the hoarsest of the three.

The child flinched before opening the door, but she did open it, and set one foot over the threshold; then she stopped. There was nothing in the cottage but a muddy puddle on the floor, into which rain ran from the broken roof. Three men sat together in the puddle, squatted like frogs. They had broad noses and spotted faces, and the brightest of bright eyes, which were all turned to look at Melilot when she came in.

"We are glad to see you, Melilot," said the one who sat in the middle, holding out a hand that had all its fingers webbed together. He was the one who had the hoarsest voice. "My friend on the right is Dock, Dodder sits on my left, and I am Squill. Come in and shut the door behind you."

Melilot had to choose between the dreary, empty world outside, and trust in these three creatures—who were more horrible to look at than I care to tell. She hesitated only for an instant, then went in and shut the door behind her.

"A long time ago your father came to us, and he went out and shut the door upon us. You are wiser than your father, little girl."

"My father, Oh my dear father!" began Melilot, and fell to weeping bitterly.

"Her father is dead," said Dock, who was the least hoarse.

"And her mother too," said Dodder, who was hoarser.

"And she wants us to help her to bury them," croaked Squill.

"She is fainting with hunger," said Dock.

"She is dying of hunger and grief," said Dodder.

"And we have nothing to offer her but tadpoles, which she cannot eat," said Squill.

"Dear neighbours, I am nothing," said the child. "I do not know that I am hungry. But if you would come with me and help me."

"She asks us to her house," said Dock.

"We may go," said Dodder, "if we are invited."

"Little Melilot," said Squill then, in his hoarsest tone of all, "we will all follow you to the mountain hut." Then the three ugly creatures splashed out of their pool, and moved, web-footed too, about their cottage with ungainly hopping. Melilot all the while only thanked them, frankly looking up into their bright eyes, that were eager, very eager, but not cruel.

CHAPTER II.

THE MOUNTAIN HUT.

Melilot, with her three wonderful neighbours, Dock, Dodder, and Squill, hopping arm in arm behind her, and getting a good hold on the stones with their web feet, began to climb the mountain. Rain still poured out of the sky; runlets flooded their path, and the great cataract roared by their side. The faint and hungry child had climbed but half the way to her desolate home when she swooned, and was caught in the arms of Squill.

"Sprinkle water," said Dock.

"No need of that," said Dodder.

"It will not be right for us to carry her," said Squill.

Either because there was more than a sprinkling of water, or because of her own stout young heart, Melilot recovered and climbed on. They reached the hut, and when there, the three neighbours at once bestirred themselves. Because of the flood outside, they dug the graves under the roof, one on each side of the hearth, for Melilot's dead father and mother, and so buried them. Then the child made her friends sit down to rest; one in her father's chair, one in her mother's, and one on her own little stool. She raked the embers of the fire and put on fresh wood until a blaze leapt up that was strong enough to warm them before she would turn aside. Then standing in a corner by the morsel of window that looked out towards the waterfall, she gave way to her sobbing. But again—brave little heart—conquering herself, she came forward to where the monsters were sitting, with their legs crossed, basking in the firelight, and said, "I am sorry, dear, kind neighbours, that I have no supper to offer you."

"Nay, but you have," said Dock.

The child followed the glance of his eyes, and saw that on her father's grave there stood a loaf of bread, and on her mother's grave a cup of milk.

"They are for you, from the good angels." She said, "Oh, I am thankful!" Then Melilot broke the bread into three pieces, and gave a piece to each, and held the milk for them when they would drink.

"She is famished herself," said Dodder.

"We must eat all of it up," said Squill.

So they ate all of it up; and while they ate, there was no thought in the child's heart but of pleasure that she had this bread to give.

When they had eaten all, there was another loaf upon the father's grave, and on the mother's grave another and a larger cup of milk.

"See there!" Dock said.

"Whose supper is that?" asked Dodder.

"It must be for the pious little daughter Melilot, and no one else," said Squill.

The three neighbours refused to take another crumb; they had eaten so much tadpole, they said, for their dinners. Melilot, therefore, supped, but left much bread and milk, secretly thinking that her friends would require breakfast, if they should consent to stay with her throughout the night. It was long since the sun set, reddening the mists of the plain, and now the mountain path beside the torrent was all dark and very perilous. The monsters eagerly watched their little hostess with their brilliant eyes, and assented, as it seemed, with exultation, to her wish that they would sleep in the hut. There were but two beds under its roof—Melilot's own little straw pallet, and that on which her parents were to sleep no more, on which she was no more to kneel beside them in the humble morning prayer. With sacred thoughts of hospitality the child gave up to the use of those who had smoothed for her dear parents a new bed, the bed that was no longer theirs; and the three monsters, after looking at her gratefully, lay down on it together and went to sleep on it, with their arms twisted about each other's necks. The child looked down upon them, clinging together in their sleep as in their talk, and saw a weariness of pain defined in many a kindly-turned line of their half frog-like faces. If one stirred in sleep, it was to nestle closer to the other two. "How strange," she said to herself, "that I should at first have thought them ugly!" Then she knelt in prayer by her little nest of straw, and did not forget them in her prayers. There was a blessing on them in her heart as she lay down to sleep.

But when Melilot lay down with her face towards the hearth, the dying embers shone with a red light on the two solemn graves. She turned her face to the wall, and the rush of the torrent on the other side was louder than the passion of her weeping. But the noise of the waterfall first soothed her, and then, fixing her attention, drew her from her bed towards the little window, from which she was able to look out into the black night through which it roared. A night not altogether black, for there was a short lull in the rain, though the wind howled round the mountain, and through a chance break in the scurrying night-clouds the full moon now and then flashed, lighting the lakes in the valley far below, and causing the torrent outside the window to gleam through the night shadows of the great rocks among which it fell. Could it be the song of busy Fairies that came thence to the child's ear?

"Up to the moon and cut down that ray!
In and out the foam-wreaths plaiting;
Spin the froth and weave the spray!
Melilot is watching! Melilot is waiting!
Pick the moonbeam into shreds,
Twist it, twist it into threads!
Threads of the moonlight, yarn of the bubble,
Weave into muslin, double and double!
Fold all and carry it, tarry ye not,
To the chamber of gentle and true Melilot."

Almost at the same moment the door of the hut opened, and Melilot, turning round, saw two beautiful youths enter, bright as the moonlight, who laid a white bale at her feet, and said that it came from the Fairy Muslin Works. Having done that, they flew out in the shape of fire-flies, and Melilot herself closed the door after them. It was her first act to shut the door, because she was bred to be a careful little housewife, and she thought the night-air would not be good for the sleepers.

Then the child looked again at the three monsters cuddled together on her father's and mother's bed. "The Fairies have done this for me," she considered to herself, "that I might not have to send away kind helpers without a gift. White muslin is not quite the dress that will suit lodging such as theirs, but it is all I have! If I could make them, by the time they wake, three dresses, they would see, at any rate, that I was glad to work for them as they had worked for me."

So Melilot began measuring her neighbours with the string of her poor little apron; and when she had measured them all, shrank, with her scissors and thread and the bale of fairy muslin, into the farthest corner of her hut, and set to work by the light of a pine-stick, shaded from the eyes of her guests with a screen made of her own ragged old frock.

While the child stitched, the Fairies sang, and it was a marvel to her that her needle never wanted threading. Keeping time with her fingers to the fairy song, she worked with a speed that almost surpassed her desire, and altogether surpassed understanding. One needleful of thread made the three coats, and the thread, when the coats were made, was as long as it had been when they were begun.

Very soon after dawn the white dresses were made, and all the muslin had been used in making them, except what was left in the small litter of fragments round the stool upon which Melilot had been at work. Three coats of white muslin, daintily folded, were laid by the bed of the three guests, and each was folded with that corner uppermost on which there had been written in thread its owner's name. Dock was worked in the corner of one; Dodder in the corner of another; and in the corner of the third coat, Squill.

Then Melilot lay down for an hour's sleep, and, weary with grief as with toil, slept heavily. Dock, Dodder, and Squill were awake before her, and the first thing that each of them did upon waking was to look upon his new coat. The next thing that each of them did was to put on his new coat; and after this the next thing they all did was to change into three beautiful Fairy youths—Dock with yellow hair, Dodder with brown, and Squill with black. Thus they stood hand in hand by the little girl's bed.

"She has freed us, the dear child!" said Dock.

"She," said Dodder, "she, our darling, and our brothers of the waterfall."

"She has saved nothing for herself," said Squill. "Did not the child once wish to wear muslin in the place of these poor rags? I kiss them, brothers, for her sake." But Squill's kiss on the girl's ragged frock made it a treasure for an empire.

"And I kiss the walls that sheltered us," said Dodder. But Dodder's kiss upon the walls changed them into a close network of fragrant blossoms.

"And I kiss the lips that bade us hither," Dock said; and at his kiss the child smiled, and her eyes opened upon the three Fairies in the muslin dresses she had made.

"Ah, Fairies," she said, "those are the dresses I made for my three dear neighbours. Do not take back your gift, although the muslin is indeed yours, and the thread too, I know, and—and the work too, for surely it was you who made the needle run. I have done nothing, and am but a poor little child; only I thought you meant to give me something to be grateful with."

"We did not give you your good heart, dear little Melilot," the Fairies said; and now their speaking was in softest unison. "That has done more for us than all our love and service will repay. We were your neighbours, but we are your servants now."

"No, no, no," said the child. "I was afraid to ask to be your servant, because I thought last night you were too poor to feed me, as I am too poor and weak to feed myself. The angels themselves gave me bread yesterday, and I have some yet. But all is changed about me. Why do the walls flower, and why is my dress covered with glittering stones? Ah, yes, I am at home," she said, for her eyes fell on the two graves.

Then, as she rose to her knees, with quivering lips, the three Fairies went out into the sun, and stood at the door to see how all the rains were gone, and the bright morning beams played in the spray of the cataract.

"Do you see anything between us and the sun?" Dock asked of the other two.

"A speck," said Dodder.

"Frogbit herself," said Squill.

CHAPTER III.

SIR CRUCIFER.

Presently Melilot bade the three Fairies come in to share her breakfast. She had saved bread from last night, and while she took it from its place among the blossoms that last night were mud, again the loaf of bread stood on her father's, and the cup of milk upon her mother's, grave. "The angels of my father and mother feed me still," she said; "I must abide under the shelter of their wings."

The Fairies came at her bidding to eat with her; but Squill, excusing himself, went to the stool about which were the chips and shreds of Fairy muslin. There, joining each to each with a stroke of his finger, he was shaping them into a little net, when Melilot, who had been sent out to feel the sunshine, came in, saying that there was a chill wind; and though it was foolishness to think so, it did really seem to have come with a black raven that was sitting on the roof.

"You had better strike through the roof, Frogbit," Squill cried, looking up. The bird croaked as if in defiance, and at once began to beat a way in through the flowers. As it did so, the leaves of the bower withered, and the blossoms all began to stink.

But Squill leapt up, and holding the net he had made under the hole Frogbit was making, caught her as she fell through, and held her captured in the folds of Fairy muslin that seemed to stand like iron against the beating of her wings.

"Poor bird!" said Melilot.

"Our enemy, who came on a bad errand, is our prisoner," said Dock.

"Cleverly done," said Dodder. "Very cleverly done, brother Squill."

But Melilot, who loved man, beast, and bird, bent over the fluttering raven, and was not hindered from taking it, net and all, to her bosom, though it struck at her fiercely with its great bill that, strong as it was, could not tear through the muslin net.

"Poor bird!" said the child; "how can a raven be your enemy?"

"Theirs and yours!" the raven herself shrieked. "Theirs and yours!"

"And mine, bird! I would do you no hurt. See, I kiss you." When Melilot stooped to kiss through the thin muslin the raven's head, the bird struggled to escape from the kiss with an agony of terror.

"Nay," said the gentle child, "no evil can come of a true kiss."

Good came of it; for at the touch of her kiss, the wicked Fairy Frogbit dropped out of the form of a raven into a black, shapeless lump of earth.

"What have I done?" the child cried, weeping.

Then the three Fairies threw the lump of earth into the waterfall, and told her all that she had done. They told her how of old they had lived with their brother Fairies of the Torrent till the wicked Frogbit came and turned the land below into a marshy wilderness, in which she ruled over her own evil race. One day she and her people had contrived to seize Titania herself, as she flew over the marsh on the way to her subjects of the mountain. They could not change her beauty, or stain her bright nature, but they held her prisoner for a time among their stagnant pools, till she was rescued in a moonlight attack by the Fairies of the waterfall, who left three prisoners, Dock, Dodder and Squill, in the hands of the enemy. Those prisoners Frogbit had shut up in loathsome frog-like bodies, and set in the cottage between the lakes, while she brought down never-ending rain over the whole district, to make their prison more gloomy. The Fairies of the bright running and leaping water were condemned to sit in stagnant puddle, and eat tadpoles, having their own bright natures shut up in forms so detestable, that Frogbit hoped to make their case more wretched by a mockery of hope.

"Live there," she said, "till a mortal child can look at you without being afraid; till there is a little girl in the world bold enough to seek you out, and trust you with all that she holds most sacred; to shut herself up with you, and believe in you entirely; to give up to you her own supper, and of her own free thought make white muslin dresses to your filthy shapes."

She spoke mockingly of white muslin, because she knew of the old Fairy trade that had been carried on for ages on the mountains. There the Fairies weave after their own fashion into muslin the white sheets of foam; and when the three prisoners had heard their doom they were not in despair. For although Frogbit, who had never been up the mountain, knew nothing of the one little hut there was upon it, yet all the Fairies knew it, and they knew well the little Melilot.

"Then I have really been a friend to you," the child said.

"Ay," they replied, "and to Frogbit a friend. An innocent kiss is the charm that breaks all evil spells, and you have with a kiss broken the spell that raised in her a clod of earth into a creature of mischief. We of the torrent will direct the waters that they wash that clod of earth from which evil is banned to a place where it may yield lilies and violets, of which good Fairies shall be born."

The three Fairies returning to their own race, were still Melilot's neighbours and friends, and the child grew up to womanhood, the favourite of all the Fairies of the waterfall. Her bower blossomed, and the ground about it was made into a delicious garden. Her dress of precious stones was thrown into a corner, and she was arrayed by the Fairies in their shining muslin that would take no soil. But still she found, morning and night, the only bread she ate upon her father's grave, and upon her mother's grave the milk that nourished her.

Whether the bad Fairies over whom Frogbit had ruled left the marsh, Melilot did not know, but the marsh dried and became a great plain, which men tilled, and upon which at last men fought.

Sobbing and panting, Melilot ran down the hill-side when she saw men cased in iron galloping to and fro, and falling wounded to lie bleeding and uncared for on the quaking ground. Every fear was mastered by her sacred pity, and her Fairy muslin was unstained, though she knelt on the red mud of the battle-field and laid the wounded soldier's head upon her lap. None, even in the direst madness of the strife, could strike upon the frail white girl, who saw only the suffering about her, and thought only of wounds that she might bind. Had any struck, her muslin was an armour firmer than all steel; and there was no rent in her dress, as she tore from it strip after strip, to bind rents in the flesh of men who lay in their death-agonies about her.

In the tumult of flight, the defeated host parted before her, and sped on, still leaving her untrampled and untouched. But once, reaching a white arm into the crowd, she caught from it a wounded soldier as he fell, and with the other hand seized the shaft of the spear that a fierce youth, hot in pursuit, thrust on his falling enemy. She fainted as she did so; and the youth, letting his spear drop, knelt beside her, and looked down into her face. His tears presently were falling on her lifeless cheek. The flight and the pursuit rushed by, and he was still kneeling beside her, when the moon rose, and three youths, dressed in white, stood near.

"Are you her brothers?" he asked. "Who is this, with a dress that has passed unstained through blood and mire, and with a face so holy?"

"Take her up in your arms," they said, "and we will show you where to carry her."

The young soldier lifted her with reverence, and took her up the mountain to the bower by the waterfall. The scent of the flowers, when they came into its garden, gave fresh life to her. The soldier gently laid her down upon a bank of wild thyme, and looked up for the three youths, but they were gone. He went into the bower, and saw therein scanty furniture, a dress of jewels worth an empire thrown into a corner, and two graves, on one of which stood bread, and on the other milk. He brought the food out to the girl, and, at her bidding, broke bread with her.

Now Dock, Dodder, and Squill were match-makers. They had made up their minds that Melilot should be to Sir Crucifer—that was the soldier's name—as near in trust and in love as her mother had been to her father. So they put the cottage between the two lakes into repair, and made him a home out of the place in which they had been imprisoned. There he dreamt, all the nights through, sacred dreams of her by whose side he spent all his days.

Much the girl heard, as she sat with the soldier by the waterfall, of the high struggle for all that makes man good and glorious, that bred the strife out of which she had drawn him for a little time. Much the soldier learnt as he sat with the girl, from a companion whose thoughts purified his zeal, and made his aspirations happier and more unbounded. One day there were words said that made the girl a woman; and when she awoke on the next morning, her father's grave was overgrown with laurel bushes, and her mother's grave was lost under a wealth of flowering myrtle.

But there was no food provided.

When Sir Crucifer came to her that sunny morning, "I have a sign," she said. "It is time that I also take my part in the struggle of which you have told me. Let us go down together to the plains."

She gathered for him a branch of laurel, and she plucked a sprig of myrtle for herself. These never faded; they remained green as the daughter's memory of those two dear ones from whose graves they came. But in all their long after-lives of love and labour, neither of them remembered the worth of an empire in stone that they left unregarded in a corner of the hut.

The spray was radiant, and the foam was white as her bright Fairy muslin, as it floated over the strength of the waterfall, when Melilot and her soldier, hand in hand, went down the mountain. They passed out of her bower, she in the full flood of the sunshine, with an arm raised upward and a calm face turned towards him, as he, walking in her shadow, pointed to the plains below.

THE ARCHITECT.

A MAN possessed a piece of woodland near a rock. He cut down trees.

"Faugh!" cried a Rook. "You fell the trees in which you could have rested. Had you come to me I could have let you know the use of trees."

"I have a house to build," said the man.

"Well," said the Rook, "sticks and straws can be had without cutting the trees down, I believe."

The man hewed at the rock. Capricorn looked down from above, and grinned over his beard as he called his brother goats about him. "Ah, ha!" he said, "observe that creature's low comprehension of this glorious rock, with its mosses and its grassy clefts. He cuts it into little squares! Look at his piles of little squares, and not even a blade of grass on one of them!" All the goats bleated at the man in mockery, and Capricorn cried to him, "Come up, fellow, and we who are at home among the rocks will teach you something."

"Pardon me, hoary father," said the man; "I have a house to build."

The man heaped lime together, and fetched water from a pool in which some geese were swimming. "S-s-see," said the Gander, "how you splash me, and befoul the water too. What do you want?"

"Excuse me, Gaffer Gander," said the man; "I have a house to build."

"A house to build!" the Gander said. "You don't build houses of water, I suppose!" All the geese hissed at the man for his folly, but he drew the water that he wanted.

"A pretty mess you're making of it!" said a Spider to the man when he was stirring up his mortar. "House, do you say? Look at my architecture and compare it with that heap of slime. You would have saved yourself much shame if you had only come to me for an idea."

The man dug at the foundations of his house and struck wrath into the hearts of all the moles. "Why," one of them asked, "are you interfering in this manner with our ancient right of way?"

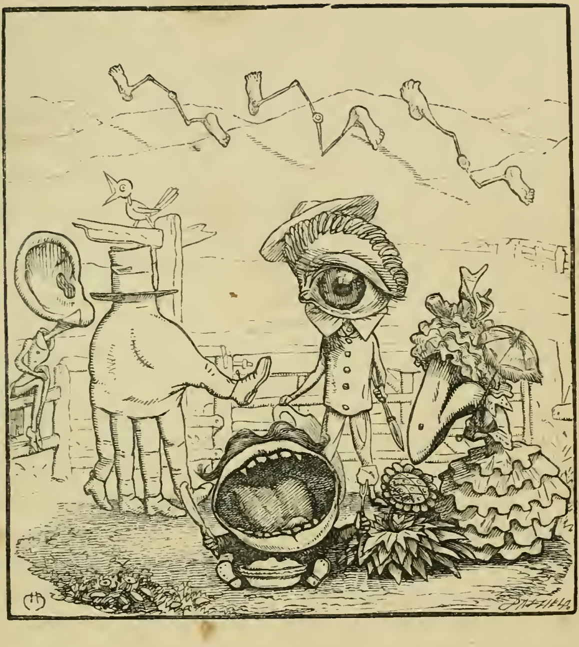
"Pardon me, brother mole; I have a house to build."

"Hear him! A house to build. Is there a mole of you who does not know that houses are built up into the air? Behold a being with brains topsy-turvy, who is building down into the ground! Out with him!"

All the moles showed their teeth in vain; the man dug on. When he had laid a sure foundation, with the stones and timber he built an abiding-place. And the house that he had built remained to be the glory of his children's children.

STANZA.

Night hath to God departed, prayer-laden,
As when through autumn twilight homeward throng,
From the day's gleaning, maiden after maiden,
Each with a full sheaf glad, so—with a song
Awakening the lark—so pass along,
Their bosoms burdened with a gathered store,
The pleasant hours which to the night belong,
And in the garner of our God they pour
Hopes, praises, pure resolves, fruits which the darkness bore.



ADVENTURES IN SKITZLAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING IS A BORE—I FALL INTO MISFORTUNE.

I am fond of gardening. I like to dig. If among the operations of the garden any need for such a work can be at any time discovered or invented, I like digging a hole. On the 3rd of March, 1839, I began a hole behind the kitchen wall, whereinto it was originally intended to transplant a plum-tree. The exercise was so much to my taste, that a strange humour impelled me to dig on. A fascination held me to the task. I neglected my business. I disappeared from the earth's surface. A boy, who worked a basket by means of a rope and pulley, aided me; so aided, I confined my whole attention to spade labour. The centripetal force seemed to have made me its especial victim. I dug on until Autumn. In the beginning of November I observed that, upon percussion, the sound given by the floor of my pit was resonant. I did not intermit my labour, urged as I was by a mysterious instinct downwards. On applying my ear, I occasionally heard a subdued sort of rattle, which caused me to form a theory that the centre of the earth might be composed of mucus. In November the ground broke beneath me into a hollow, and I fell a considerable distance. I alighted on the box-seat of a four-horse coach, which happened to be running at that time immediately underneath. The coachman took no notice whatever of my sudden arrival by his side. He was so completely muffled up that I could observe only the skilful way in which he handled reins and whip. The horses were yellow. I had seen no more than this, when the guard's horn blew, and presently we pulled up at an inn. A waiter came out, and appeared to collect four bags from the passengers inside the coach. He then came round to me.

"Dine here, sir?"

"Yes, certainly," said I.

"Trouble you for your stomach, sir."

While the waiter was looking up with a polite stare into my puzzled face, my neighbour, the coachman, put one hand within his outer coat, as if to feel for money in his waistcoat pocket. Directly afterwards his fingers came again to light, and pulled forth an enormous sack. Notwithstanding that it was abnormally enlarged, I knew by observation of its form and texture that this was a stomach, with the œsophagus attached. This, then, the waiter caught as it was thrown down to him, and hung it carelessly over his arm, together with the four smaller bags (which I now knew to be also stomachs) collected from the passengers within the coach. I started up, and as I happened to look round, observed a skeleton face upon the shoulders of a gentleman who sat immediately behind my back. My own features were noticed at the same time by the guard, who now came forward, touching his hat.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but you've been and done it."

"Done what?"

"Why, sir, you should have booked your place, and not come up in this clandestine way. However, you've been and done it!"

"My good man, what have I done?"

"Why, sir, the Baron Terroro's eyes had the box-seat, and I strongly suspect you've been and sat upon them."

I looked involuntarily to see whether I had been sitting upon anything except the simple cushion. Truly enough, there was an eye, which I had crushed and flattened.

"Only one," I said.

"Worse for you, and better for him. The other eye had time to escape, and it will know you again, that's certain. Well, it's no business of mine. Of course you've no appetite now for dinner? Better pay your fare, sir. To the Green Bull in Spectacles, where we put up, it's ten-and-six."

"Is there room inside?" I inquired. It was advisable to shrink from observation.

"Yes, sir. The inside passengers are mostly skeleton. There's room for three, sir. Inside, one-pound-one."

I paid the money, and became an inside passenger.

CHAPTER II.

OF DIVISIONS WHICH OCCUR IN SKITZLAND—I AM TAKEN UP.

Professor Zucker's Lectures on Anatomy had so fortified me, that I did not shrink from entering the Skitzton coach. It contained living limbs, loose or attached to skeletons, in other respects bare, except that they were clothed with broadcloth garments, cut after the English fashion. One passenger only had a complete face of flesh; he had also one living hand; the other hand I guessed was bony, because it was concealed in a glove obviously padded. By observing the fit of his clothes, I came to a conclusion that this gentleman was stuffed throughout; that all his limbs, except the head and hand, were artificial. Two pairs of legs, in woollen stockings, and a pair of ears, were in a corner of the coach, and in another corner there were nineteen or twenty scalps.

I thought it well to look astonished at nothing; and having pointed in a careless manner to the scalps, asked what might be their destination. The person with the face and hand replied to me; and, although evidently himself a gentleman, he addressed me with a tone of unconcealed respect.

"They are going to Skitzton, sir, to the hair-dresser's."

"Yes, to be sure," I said. "They are to make natural skin wigs. I might have known."

"I beg your pardon, sir. There is a ball to-morrow night at Culmsey. But the gentry do not like to employ village barbers, and therefore many of the better class of people send their hair to Skitzton, and receive it back by the return coach properly cut and curled."

"Oh," said I. "Ah! Oh, indeed."

"Dinners, gentlemen!" said a voice at the window, and the waiter handed in four stomachs, now tolerably well filled. Each passenger received his property, and pulling open his chest with as much composure as if he were unbuttoning his waistcoat, restored his stomach, with a dinner in it, to the right position. Then the reckonings were paid, and the coach started.

I thought of my garden, and much wished that somebody could throw Professor Zucker down the hole that I had dug. A few things were to be met with in Skitzland which would rather puzzle him. They puzzled me; but I took refuge in silence, and so fortified, protected my ignorance from an exposure.

"You are going to Court, sir, I presume?" said my Face and Hand Friend, after a short pause. His was the only mouth in the coach, excepting mine, so that he was the only passenger able to enter into conversation.

"My dear sir," I replied, "let me be frank with you. I have arrived here unexpectedly out of another world. Of the manners and customs, nay, of the very nature of the people who inhabit this country, I know nothing. For any information you can give me I shall be very grateful."

My friend smiled incredulity, and said—

"Whatever you are pleased to profess, I will believe. What you are pleased to feign a wish for, I am proud to furnish. In Skitzland, the inhabitants, until they come of age, retain that illustrious appearance which you have been so fortunate as never to have lost. On and after the night of his twenty-first birthday, each Skitzlander loses the limbs which, when he had them, received from him no care, no education. Of those neglected parts the skeletons alone remain, but all those organs which he has employed sufficiently continue unimpaired. I, for example, devoted to the study of the law, forgot all occupation but to think, to use my senses, and to write. I rarely used my legs, and therefore Nature has deprived me of them."

"But," I observed, "it seems that in Skitzland you are able to take yourselves to pieces."

"No one has that power, sir, more largely than yourself. What organs we have we can detach on any service."

"If they can fly," I asked, "why are they sent in coaches? There were a pair of eyes on the box-seat."

"Simply for safety against accidents. Eyes flying alone are likely to be seized by birds, and incur many dangers. They are sent, therefore, usually under protection, like any other valuable parcel."

"Do many accidents occur?"

"Very few. For mutual protection, and also because a single member is often all that has been left existing of a fellow Skitzlander, our laws, as you, sir, know much better than myself, estimate the destruction of any part absent on duty from its skeleton as a crime equivalent to murder."

After this I held my tongue. Presently my friend again inquired whether I was going up to Court?

"Why should I go to Court?"

"Oh, sir, it pleases you to be facetious. You must be aware that any Skitzlander who has been left by Nature in possession of every limb, sits in the Assembly of the Perfect, or the Upper House, and receives many state emoluments and dignities."

"Are there many members of that Upper Assembly?"

"Sir, there were forty-two. But if you are now travelling to claim your seat, the number will be raised to forty-three."

"The Baron Terroro," I hinted.

"My brother, sir. His eyes are on the box-seat under my care. Undoubtedly he is a member of the Upper House."

I was now anxious to get out of the coach as soon as possible. My wish was fulfilled after the next pause. One Eye, followed by Six Pairs of Arms, with strong hard Hands belonging to them, flew in at the window. I was collared; the door was opened, and all hands were at work to drag me out and away. The twelve Hands whisked me through the air, while the one Eye sailed before us, like an old bird, leader of the flight.

CHAPTER III.

MY IMPRISONMENT AND TRIAL FOR MURDER.

What sort of sky have they in Skitzland? Our earth over-arches them, and, as the sunlight filters through, it causes a subdued illumination with very pure rays. Skitzland is situated nearly in the centre of our globe; it hangs there like a shrunken kernel in the middle of a nut-shell. The height from Skitzland to the over-arching canopy is great; so great, that if I had not fallen personally from above the firmament, I should have considered it to be a blue sky similar to ours. At night it is quite dark; but during the day there is an appearance in the heaven of white spots; their glistening reminded me of stars. I noticed them as I was being conveyed to prison by the strong arms of justice; for it was by a detachment of members from the Skitzton police that I was now hurried along. The air was very warm, and corroborated the common observation of an increase of heat as you get into the pith of our planet. The theory of Central Fire, however, is, you perceive, quite overturned by my experience.

We alighted near the outskirts of a large and busy town. Through its streets I was dragged publicly, much stared at, and much staring. The street-life was one busy nightmare of disjointed limbs. Professor Zucker, could he have been dragged through Skitzton, would have delivered his farewell lecture upon his return. "Gentlemen, Fuit Ilium—Fuit Ischium—Fuit Sacrum—Anatomy has lost her seat among the sciences. My occupation's gone." Professor Owen's book "On the Nature of Limbs" must contain in the next edition an appendix "Upon Limbs in Skitzland." I was dragged through the streets, and all that I saw there, in the present age of little faith, I dare not tell you. I was dragged through the streets to prison, and there duly chained, after having been subjected to the scrutiny of about fifty couples of eyes drawn up in a line within the prison door. I was chained in a dark cell—a cell so dark that I could very faintly perceive the figure of some being who was my companion. Whether this individual had ears wherewith to hear, and mouth wherewith to answer me, I could not see; but at a venture I addressed him. My thirst for information was unconquerable; I began, therefore, immediately with a question—

"Friend, what are those stars which we see shining in the sky at mid-day?"

An awful gloom being an unsatisfactory reply, I asked again.

"Man, do not mock at misery. You will yourself be one of them."

"Believe me," I said, "I am strangely ignorant. Explain yourself."

He answered with a hollow voice—

"Murderers are shot up out of mortars into the sky, and stick there. Those white, glistening specks, they are their skeletons."

Justice is prompt in Skitzland. I was tried incredibly fast by a jury of twelve men who had absolutely heads.

The judges had nothing but brain, mouth, and ear. Three powerful tongues defended me; but, as they were not suffered to talk nonsense, they had little to say. The whole case was too clear to be talked into cloudiness. Baron Terroro in person deposed that he had sent his eyes to see a friend at Culmsey, and that they were returning on the Skitzton coach, when I, illegally, came with my whole bulk upon the box-seat, which he occupied. That one of his eyes was, in that manner, totally destroyed, but that the other eye, having escaped, identified me, and brought to his brain intelligence of the calamity which had befallen. He deposed further that, having received this information, he despatched his uncrushed eye with arms from the police office, and accompanied by several members of the detective force, to capture the offender, and to procure the full proofs of my crime. A sub-inspector of the Skitzton police then deposed that he sent three of his faculties, with his mouth, eye, and ear, to meet the coach. That the driver, consisting only of a stomach and hands, had been unable to observe what passed. That the guard, on the contrary, had taxed me with my deed, that he had seen me rise from my seat upon the murdered eye, and that he had heard me make confession of my guilt. The guard was brought next into court, and told his tale. Then I was called upon for my defence. If a man wearing a cloth coat and trousers, and talking excellent English, were to plead at the Old Bailey that he had broken into some citizen's premises accidentally by falling from the moon, his tale would be received in London as mine was in Skitzton. I was severely reprimanded for my levity, and ordered to be silent. The judge summed up, and the jury found me guilty. The judge, who had put on the black cap before the verdict was pronounced, held out no hope of mercy, and straightway sentenced me to death, according to the laws and usage of the realm.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST HOURS OF THE CONDEMNED IN SKITZLAND—I AM EXECUTED.

The period which intervenes between the sentence and execution of a criminal in Skitzland is not longer than three hours. In order to increase the terror of death by contrast, the condemned man is suffered to taste at the table of life from which he is banished the most luscious viands. All the attainable enjoyment that his wit can ask for he is allowed to have, during the three hours before he is shot, like rubbish, off the fields of Skitzland.

Under guard, of course, I was now to be led whithersoever I desired.

Several churches were open. They never are all shut in Skitzton. I was taken into one. A man with heart and life was preaching. People with hearts were in some pews; people with brains in others; people with ears only in some. In a neighbouring church there was a popular preacher, a skeleton with life. His congregation was a crowd of ears, and nothing more.

There was a day performance at the Opera. I went to that. Fine lungs and mouths possessed the stage, and afterwards there was a great bewilderment with legs. I was surprised to notice that many of the most beautiful ladies were carried in and out, and lifted about like dolls. My guides sneered at my pretence of ignorance when I asked why this was. But they were bound to please me in all practicable ways, so they informed me, although somewhat pettishly. It seems that in Skitzland, ladies who possess and have cultivated only their good looks, lose, at the age of twenty-one, all other endowments. So they become literally dolls, but dolls of a superior kind; for they can not only open and shut their eyes, but also sigh; wag slowly with their heads, and sometimes take a pocket-handkerchief out of a bag, and drop it. But as their limbs are powerless, they have to be lifted and dragged about after the fashion that excited my astonishment.

I said then, "Let me see the poor." They took me to a workhouse. The men there were all yellow, and they wore a dress which looked as though it were composed of asphalt; it had also a smell like that of pitch. I asked for explanation of these things.

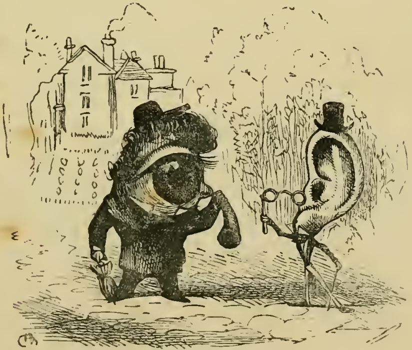
A superintendent of police remarked that I was losing opportunities of real enjoyment for the idle purpose of persisting in my fable of having dropped down from the sky. However, I compelled him to explain to me what was the reason of these things. The information I obtained was briefly this—that Nature, in Skitzland, never removes the stomach. Every man has to feed himself; and the necessity for finding food, joined to the necessity for buying clothes, is a mainspring whereby the whole clockwork of civilised life is kept in motion. Now, if a man positively cannot feed and clothe himself, he becomes a pauper. He then goes to the workhouse, where he has his stomach filled with a cement. That stopping lasts a life-time, and he thereafter needs no food. His body, however, becomes yellow by the superfluity of bile. The yellow-boy, which is the Skitzland epithet for pauper, is at the same time provided with a suit of clothes. The clothes are of a material so tough that they can be worn unrepaired for more than eighty years. The pauper is now freed from care, but were he in this state cast loose upon society, since he has not that stimulus to labour which excites industry in other men, he would become an element of danger in the state. Nature no longer compelling him to work, the law compels him. The remainder of his life is forfeit to the uses of his country. He labours at the workhouse, costing nothing more than the expense of lodging, after the first inconsiderable outlay for cement wherewith to plug his stomach, and for the one suit of apparel.

When we came out of the workhouse, all the bells in the town were tolling. The superintendent told me that I had sadly frittered away time, for I had now no more than half an hour to live. Upon that I leaned my back against a post, and asked him to prepare me for my part in the impending ceremony by giving me a little information on the subject of executions.

I found that it was usual for a man to be executed with great ceremony upon the spot whereon his crime had been committed. That in case of rebellions or tumults in the provinces, when large numbers were not unfrequently condemned to death, the sentence of the law was carried out in the chief towns of the disturbed districts. That large numbers of people were thus sometimes discharged from a single market-place, and that the repeated strokes appeared to shake, or crack, or pierce in some degree that portion of the sky towards which the artillery had been directed. I here at once saw that I had discovered the true cause of earthquakes and volcanoes; and this shows how great light may be thrown upon theories concerning the hidden constitution of this earth by going more deeply into the matter of it than had been done by any one before I dug my hole. Our volcanoes, it is now proved, are situated over the market-places of various provincial towns in Skitzland. When a revolution happens, the rebels are shot up—discharged from mortars by means of an explosive material evidently far more powerful than our gunpowder or gun-cotton; and they are pulverised by the friction in grinding their way through the earth. How simple and easy truth appears when we have once arrived at it.

The sound of muffled drums approached us, and a long procession turned the corner of a street. I was placed in the middle of it, Baron Terroro by my side. All then began to float so rapidly away that I was nearly left alone, when forty arms came back and collared me. It was considered to be a proof of my refractory disposition that I would make no use of my innate power of flight. I was therefore dragged in this procession swiftly through the air, drums playing, fifes lamenting.

We alighted on the spot where I had fallen, and the hole through which I had come I saw above me. It was very small, but the light from above shining more vividly through it made it look, with its rough edges, like a crumpled moon. A quantity of some explosive liquid was poured into a large mortar, which had been erected (under the eye of Baron Terroro) exactly where my misfortune happened. I was then thrust in, the Baron ramming me down, and pounding with a long stock or pestle upon my head in a noticeably vicious manner. The Baron then cried "Fire!" and as I shot out, in the midst of a blaze, I saw him looking upward.



CHAPTER V.

MY REVENGE UPON THE SKITZLANDERS.

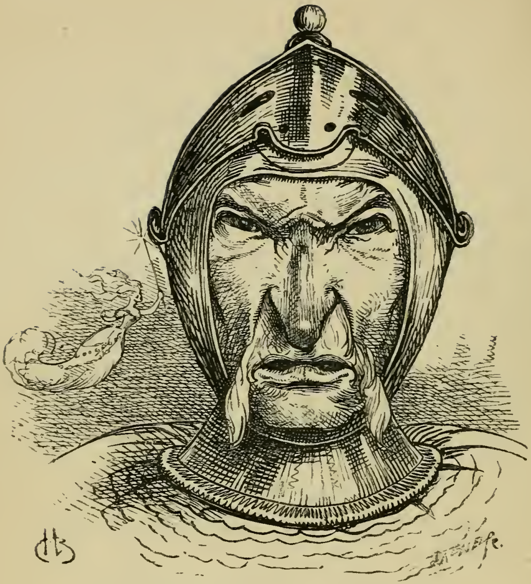
By great good fortune, they had planted their artillery so well, that I was fired up through my hole again, and alighted in my own garden just a little singed. My first thought was to run to an adjoining bed of vegetable marrows. Thirty vegetable marrows and two pumpkins I rained down to astonish the Skitzlanders, and I fervently hope that one of them may have knocked out the remaining eye of my vindictive enemy the Baron. I then went into the pantry and obtained a basket full of eggs, and having rained these down upon the Skitzlanders, I left them.

It was after breakfast when I went down to Skitzland, and I came back while the dinner-bell was ringing.

MOTHER GOOSE.

"HAVE the goodness to observe my children," said a wise-looking Goose to a Spaniel, who was playing with her puppies. "See how my dear goslings follow me about the farmyard, walking as I walk, cackling as I cackle; already, young as they are, they have the minds of perfect geese. You never see these well-trained little creatures behave as your puppies behave. Look there, now! With what show of wrath the tan pup darts at you, and gnaws your coat with his young teeth! Fun, is it? Sin, I say. Can anything be more absurd than the twisting and rolling and tumbling of yonder son of yours, who now lies on his back and snaps at flies? Why don't you confine him to the use of his four legs? Why do you let him grow up, as he will, in the belief that rolling is walking, and that flies are dog's-meat? See, see how my dear goslings follow in my train, trying to look as I look, waddle as I waddle, cackle as I cackle."

"Wise Mother Goose," answered the Spaniel, "puppies play thus when they are young, because, when they are old, they must be fit companions of men. Yours, I own, is the best training for a goose. Only give me for son a brisk young dog, whose limbs, while he is growing, twist, wriggle, and roll, and whose young wits riot in joyous antics, that hereafter he may be of body swift and strong, and of mind earnest and faithful in the service of his Master!"



SIR AYLEVAN.

CHAPTER I.

MADAME PIDGE LOOKS IN UPON THE FAIRY SAINTFOIN.

Two sticks crossed were the arms of Sir Aylevan. His wrath was quick. When he rode in the forest he would dismount to hack and punish any tree that seemed to fork its branches in contempt of him. But he was just in his anger. He would spend a whole day in a marsh, searching for the particular frog that had croaked at him when he was passing early in the morning. His hair and beard were red, his eyes were green, his face was yellow, and he had a long hooked nose, blue at the tip, yet he was beautiful as a rainbow in the eyes of Saintfoin, the meadow Fairy, who had been doomed, for an offence against the Fairy Queen, to love him heartily for a whole twelvemonth. Music to her ear was the clanking of his sword against his rusty iron armour. He was poor because he was quarrelsome, although the world contained many a smooth and thriving man, whose heart, shown fairly against Sir Aylevan's, was but as fat of hogs to frankincense.

Golden sunlight streamed among the pine-trees, and fell broken into a thousand fragments on the fern and foxglove, among which Sir Aylevan was resting in his armour, while his horse followed the sound of running water to a fountain near at hand. Worried by gnats, the Knight leapt to his feet, and fighting savagely with his tormentors, chased them through the trees until he lost the brake in which he had been resting. The way back to it could not be found, and the mischance was serious, for in that brake his faithful horse awaited him. Up started a hare, and ran against his leg. It was poor little Fairy Saintfoin. Sir Aylevan fiercely pursued the hare, and lost her at the tree beside which his own horse was standing. Then the Knight, forgetful of his rage, patted the steed fondly, for he loved him as a friend, and mounted to pursue his journey.

But the shades of evening had fallen, and the night breeze touched the forest. Lofty trees creaked in the wind, and rubbed their stems together, making weird sounds in the lonely wilderness. The breeze was cold. A speck of light shone down the bridle-path before the traveller, and as he stumbled forward, leading his horse by the bridle, he came to a little girl carrying a pine torch that burnt with a green flame.

"Do you belong, child, to a cottage in which I may rest?"

"Our house is but a cave, Sir Aylevan," the child replied.

"What, little one! you know my name?"

"Sir, all the forest knows how you have burnt your home behind you, and are come out to redress the wrongs of which the world is full."

The Knight, with a grim look, shouldered his lance, and its pennon was heard flapping in the night wind.

"Am I your jest?" he said.

"By the moon, no!" said the child. "I worship you, and come to beseech that you will rest to-night in our unworthy cave."

The child—it was little Saintfoin again—led the way. But the night moths were attracted by her torch; and from a tremendous hawk-moth Sir Aylevan received a blow upon the face that was not to be passively endured. Convinced that he should recognise that moth, the warrior leapt suddenly upon his horse, and plunged among the trees; but very soon the roots of trees lurking in darkness brought the good horse down upon his knees, and threw Sir Aylevan against a pine-stem.

Little Saintfoin went to her cave in the forest, where two giants, husband and wife, waited upon her, and sent them to fetch Sir Aylevan. Hoya, the she-giant, had been cured by Saintfoin of a grievous malady. In gratitude, she and her he-giant Hayo had now come to attend on the good Fairy during her year's exile, and protect her against evildoers. Hoya brought Sir Aylevan to the cave, stunned as he was, in a fold of her apron. Hayo followed, with the Knight's horse in his pocket. Knight and horse were then tenderly laid in clover, and the horse was satisfied.

When Sir Aylevan recovered a part of his senses, he found himself reclining upon moss, clover, and lavender-blossom, in a large chamber, of which the walls were thickly overgrown with living leaves and flowers, dotted with birds'-nests, out of which a sleepy chirp came now and then. The roof was mossy rock, brightened with needle points of crystal, and through a rift in the far corner of it, fringed with fern and foxglove, shone a bright planet from the outer sky. On a huge bed of clover, near that entrance to the cave, the he-giant lay sleeping. His wife nodded over a sapphire table, upon which the Fairy's pine-torch, standing upright, as it seemed, by its own power, burnt with a green, smokeless flame. Heaps of flowers were about the room, and upon these fawns, leverets, and brilliant butterflies were resting. The whole chamber was smoothly carpeted with growing heather. There was a hushing sound of music in the air, subtle as odour from the flowers, and as free from all the grating on the sense that comes with music jarred out of a mortal instrument. Sir Aylevan listened, with his eye fixed on the star, before which a fern-top waved in the night breeze. Suddenly something else flitted before the star, and a great moth, entering the cave, hummed its way to the torch-light. Sir Aylevan's rage instantly returned upon him. Was he still defied? Immediately rushing out upon the enemy, he slew him in his dance about the torch, bringing down his iron hand upon the moth, and ending its life with a crash upon the sapphire table.

The giantess ceased nodding, and jumped to her feet. Sir Aylevan, gazing down on the dead moth, was tearing his beard in dismay. "Alas, alas!" he cried, "unjust that I am! I was insulted by a Hawk, and I have slain a Spinner." Hoya took the mailed Knight up in her arms, and walked about the room with him, dancing him and hushing him as if she were his nurse, and he a baby. Then, when he ceased shrieking in despair, careless of all she did and only thinking of the innocent life he had taken, she laid him down upon his bed, and gave him his spear to play with, pointing the thick end in an inviting manner near his mouth, under the firm belief that he might like to suck it. Those giants and giantesses have not many ideas.

Hoya had had babies of her own, bigger and fiercer than Sir Aylevan, and as she had been a careful mother to them, so she would be, she was resolved, to the poor little foundling for which her tender-hearted Saintfoin had shown pity. Saintfoin had, with tender care and magic art, helped her, poor clumsy mother of giants as she was. And now it pleased the same kind spirit to take pity on an outcast baby of her race. Men did not frequent the wood in which Sir Aylevan was found; it was the home of a wild tribe of giants to which Saintfoin had been banished. The Knight's steed was, in Hoya's eyes, the toy horse which had been brought for him by his father from the distant cultivated plains.

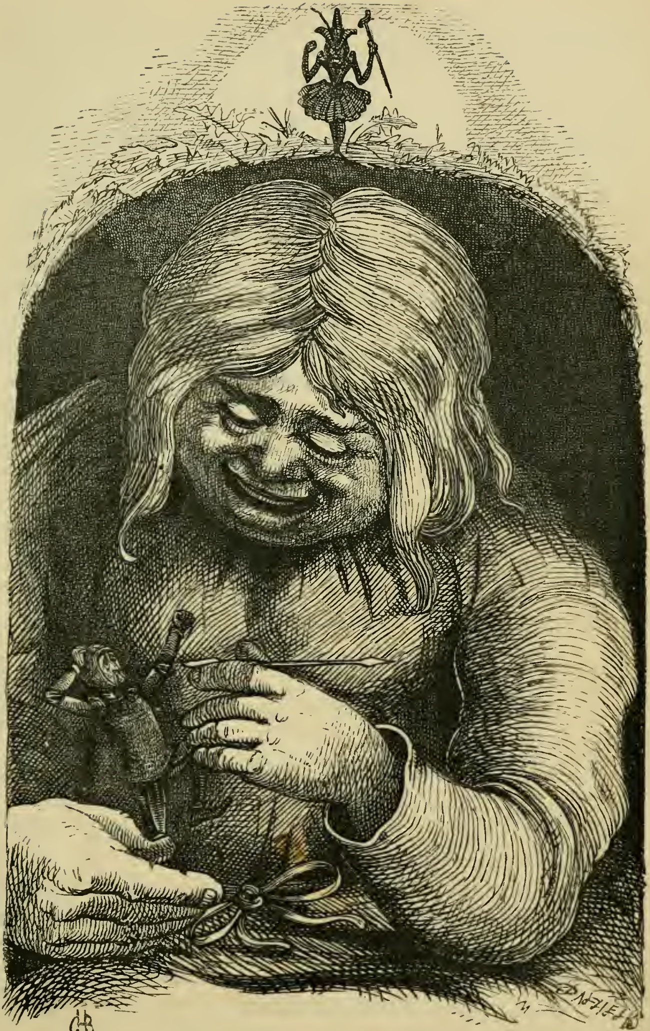
"Has one of my coach-horses been this way?" asked a voice from the rift that served as entrance to the cavern. The moon now shone over the edge of it, and against the moon there stood out, black as a chafer, the form of a tiny woman in a peaked cap, with a broad flat nose, thick lips, and eyes like red embers.

"No, Madam," said Hoya; "no coach-horses."

"One of my horses flew this way when we were unharnessing, and I shan't sleep till it is found. Ho, ho!" said the tiny woman, "what have you there upon your table?" The ill-looking little visitor spread out a pair of beetle-wings, and blundered down towards the moth. "Where's your mistress?" she said, viciously. "Tell her Madam Pidge is here."

"My mistress is out, and is not to be in till morning, Madam Pidge," said Hoya.

"Pretty doings," Pidge sneered. "But I'll kill her if she kills my horses. That's my horse, and the chit Saintfoin shall answer for it. I know where she is; and, if I don't kill her, Oberon shall be told how she hides and peeps down at his people in the mushroom-ring. A mean little set they are; but they had sense enough to turn her out, and now,



Hoya, the Giantess, and Sir Aylevan.

you great woman, she shall learn what it is to have me for a neighbour. I've taken a little place close by, because I mean to have my eye upon her, and there now—you see what she is! I have only just arrived, they unharness my travelling carriage, and already she has killed one of my horses!"

Madam Pidge threw herself about the cave, and then tumbled out through the fern at the entrance in a mighty passion. Hoya was vexed and alarmed. She roused her sleeping husband with the shout that Saintfoin was in danger. "Go, watch or warn her," she said. "You'll find her, if the moon shine, in the empty robin's nest that overlooks the Fairy ring. In the moonlight, you know, she is no bigger than this baby's thumb, so keep your eyes about you. Don't approach the nest, but watch it. If you go near while the Fairies that she slips away to watch are frolicking about, they will be playing you some idle tricks. When Saintfoin comes in your way, warn her that Madam Pidge has taken a place near her, and is deadly spiteful, because this beast of a baby has killed one of her coach-horses." Hoya, while Hayo climbed out of the cavern, took up out of his bed the still whimpering Sir Aylevan, stood him upright upon her lap, shook him, and showed him the dead moth upon the table. "Do you see there, what mischief you have done, you vicious child?"

"Wretch that I am!" cried Sir Aylevan. "It is a Spinner."

"What do you say?"

"It is the wrong sort of moth!"

"Sure enough it is the wrong sort of moth. Its death may be the death of dear little Saintfoin. Why did she ever take you in? But come, since you are here and in my charge, you must be washed and dressed. What nurse, I wonder, put a baby into clothes like these!" said Hoya; and she began to peel Sir Aylevan out of his armour as one peels a shrimp. The Knight shrieked with rage, and Hoya, who had peeled one of his legs, was throwing her baby into fits by a series of motherly attempts to pacify him, when there was a sound of gay laughter at the entrance to the cavern, and little Saintfoin was seen in the moonlight, spreading her light wings to descend. When she reached the floor of the cave and was fairly out of the moonlight, she grew to the stature of a little child again.

"Hoya, dear," she said, "what a comical great blunderer you are! Don't make pap for Sir Aylevan. He is a brave man, and as you are a sort of woman and I am a sort of woman, shall I tell you a woman's secret in your ear?" Saintfoin ran up Hoya's knees, and sitting upon her shoulder, whispered: "Oberon has given him to me to be loved." From the shoulder of the giantess, Saintfoin looked down at Sir Aylevan, who then lay quite still, looking up at her out of the grinning giantess's lap.

CHAPTER II.

SIR AYLEVAN LOOKS IN UPON MADAM PIDGE.

In the meantime good-natured Hayo stalked into the wood, and knowing the lack of brains by which a giant suffers when he has the sport of the good Fairies, or the malice of the wicked Fairies, to contend with, he resolved to bring to the aid of Saintfoin not his own head only, but the united wits of a large number of his friends. There might be brains enough in fifty giants for the errand on which he was sent; therefore he kicked up fifty of his friends whose lairs in the wood he perfectly well knew, and the faintest perception of some help that they might bring to Saintfoin was enough to join them heartily together. The poor little outcast Fairy, housed among these giants, had done them all so many tender services with her bright Fairy wit and brighter Fairy nature, that the whole tribe of big people cherished her and worshipped her. Her heart did indeed yearn for the fellowship of her old comrades within the Fairy ring, but if in her exile there was consolation to be had in giants, these were the giants to console her.

Hayo, as leader of a herd of fifty, then proceeded through the forest to the Fairy ring. Giants can trample brushwood, overthrow trees, and cause the earth to shake with the weight of their rush, but they resemble their third cousins, the elephants, in being also able to move noiselessly, and leave no broken twig upon their path, to lie hidden among the leaves, and be discovered only by the shining of their eyes when one is close upon their feet. When Hayo and his friends had glided near the Fairy ring, and the tall fellows who were nearest could even see the moonlit sward, and Fairies, like a swarm of grasshoppers, leaping about on it, they drew together, and having decided on their course of action, were picketed by Hayo round the robin's nest. The peak of a little cap was seen in it, and now and then a dull red gleam of light shone over its edge. Saintfoin, no doubt, was there. The fifty giants therefore fixed their hundred eyes upon the robin's nest, and were an Argus watchful of their favourite. They waited patiently until the moon sank low in the heavens, and the white dew began to rise among the tree-stems as a streak of dawn appeared. Then all the Fairies vanished, and the peaked cap rose high enough in the robin's nest to show a pair of dull red eyes and a broad flat nose and thick lips. Every giant saw at the same instant that it was not Saintfoin. Of course it was Pidge. Hayo dimly supposed that it was Madam Pidge, who was a new resident in the forest, about whom the other giants knew nothing at all.

Without loss of time, Pidge mounted a large cockchafer and rode away; but on the road her steed, puzzled among the darkness of the tree-tops, became entangled in the long dark hair of Hayo, who was upon duty as one of the pickets. Madam Pidge looked down to see the cause of stoppage, and observing that the legs of her steed were entangled in the hair of some clumsy, early-rising giant, she dug spitefully the point of her wand into Hayo's head, muttered a charm, and immediately all the hair dropped from it. Then Madam rode on, leaving behind her a bald-headed giant. The fifty friends would all have pursued Madam Pidge, if some of them had not been thrown into bewilderment by sight of the smooth expanse left in place of Hayo's bushy hair. A dozen of the pickets did, however, follow noiselessly upon the track of the malicious Fairy, and they ran her down to a hole in the rock under which Saintfoin lived. The hole was directly over the rift that led down into little Saintfoin's cavern.

The dozen giants then laid themselves down among the bushes and crunched pine-cones, for they had grown hungry. Their companions arrived somewhat later, in high wrath, and departed again to consult with other giants of the forest. Hayo, rubbing the bare crown of his head, re-entered Saintfoin's cavern.

During all this time, Saintfoin, who had rescued her Knight from the attentions of his nurse, had not been sitting like a little mouse in her hole, perfectly still. Hoya, fairly perceiving that Sir Aylevan could run alone, set him, brimful of wrath and remorse, upon his feet again. Saintfoin, with childish tenderness, touched one of his hands, looked up into his face, and said :—" Father Aylevan, take me upon your lap." She spoke in such loving tones that no mood could interpret into mockery.

"Child, child," answered the Knight, "I am a wicked miserable wretch, guilty and well-deserving to be scorned."

"Little Saintfoin has been made to love you, Father Aylevan," the Fairy shyly said. "It was not told her how she was to do it, but her heart has taught her she must love you very dearly as a little child. Father Aylevan, let Saintfoin sit upon your knee." The Knight sat down stubbornly; then Saintfoin, being settled in his lap, nestled her head against his bosom, and looked up with dark blue trusting eyes into his face. The sullen man's hand strayed unconsciously among her silken ringlets.

"Let me tell you a story," said the child. "Once upon a time there was a poor little bit of a Fairy, that was I, who fell out of favour at Court, and was told she must love a Knight, that was you, whom she was accused falsely of slandering."

"You slander!" cried Hoya. "You who can love a toad! I do not mean this toad," she added, shrugging her mighty shoulders at the Knight. Sir Aylevan's eyes flashed.

"Listen to me, Father," said the Fairy. "Hoya is like a thousand other folk; she has a heart larger and warmer than her tongue. I did not slander you, but some one did."

"Who, who?"

"Somebody, Father—who, I know not—somebody who paid, I think, a high price for the power of belying me, and who has taken upon herself punishment enough. For a week I was absent from the Fairy Court, and yet, as if I had been there, accused of poisoning its pure air with my slander of some angry Knight who had become my jest. Therefore they banish me. When I returned to my own people, I was already condemned to be an exile among the good monsters in this wood. Also I was to love you. Love is easy. Exile very, very hard."

Aylevan, as she said this, put his arm about her. The good heart of frankincense was warming and already giving out its fragrance.

"But if you loved the Fairy-land, poor little one, why did you leave it? You were absent for a week!"

"Only a week!" sighed Saintfoin. "When my playfellow's red lips were dry, and when his dimpled smile was fallen in the hollowness of pain and death, he tossed three weeks upon his little bed. Housewife Bridget, who lives by my own meadows outside the forest, had in her cottage a bright golden boy. She called him Robin. He was about three years old. We used to play together in the house and out among the daisies. I would sit in the room unseen and watch for his being set down from his father's knee. Of him I learnt, Father Aylevan, how children love. He was the chosen partner of my frolics. Sometimes I dared even to tickle him and smile at him when he lay in his mother's lap. Ah, Robin, dearest little dainty Robin!" Saintfoin rocked herself and was silent, for she was in tears.

"Well?" said the Knight presently, putting his other arm about her.

"Madam Pidge shook fever over the house because I loved the child, and I—I did not know it, till the little lips could answer no more to my kisses. I went to the cottage for my pleasure, and there was Death sitting in the porch. I entered, and there was an Angel bent over the little cot, watching the labour and the rattle of my Robin's breath. Who was I then? I sat still under the warm, holy shadow of the Angel's wings, and covered my face when the little soul was lifted to its rest upon the Angel's bosom. I would have comforted the mother, but how could I? Ah! what comfort can a Fairy bring to the heart-broken mother when the coffin of her darling is within her doors? I was but a playfellow, and she—Angels abided by her. As for me, I watched by the tiny coffin of my darling till they took it where I could not follow."

The Knight bent his head over little Saintfoin's weeping face and kissed her on the forehead.

"Pidge is at the bottom of everything," Hoya cried; and at this moment the bald-headed Hayo re-entered the cavern.

"Husband," cried Hoya, "where have you left your hair?"

"It is Madam Pidge who has been shaving me. But Saintfoin is here. It is all right. I'll make myself a wig of the beards of wild barley. I mean that you, Hoya, shall make me one."

"Pidge again!" Hoya cried. "We must do something to Pidge!"

"Pidge!" shouted Sir Aylevan, tenderly putting Saintfoin down as he leapt up. "The name flashes upon me! It is she! By all my chimneys that have smoked—by all the thorns that have lurked in my chairs—by all the gnats that have beset my bed—by all the frogs that have been fished out of my soup—by all the doors that have scrooped—all the beds that have groaned—all the dogs that have howled beneath my window! By the fire that I set to a house no longer to be endured, Pidge is my enemy as well as yours! I have heard rats squeak her name in the night. I have heard it hooted by the owl my arrow would not pierce. I have heard cats shriek it on my roof, and ravens croak it at my door. Me Pidge has tormented! But I am an ugly, selfish brute! Bald-headed giant, you love Saintfoin and hate Pidge. Give me my lance, and let us go!" Hoya was gone already, for the bald head of her husband troubled her. She was not gifted with original ideas; she was doing as she was told, gathering wild barley to plait into a wig.

The dawn had been filling the cave with soft shadowless light, and the birds in it were twittering their morning songs. A beam of morning sunshine gilded the ferns at the cavern's mouth, and slanted down upon its carpeting of heather. The butterflies dashed into it, the leverets and fawns leapt from their beds and gathered about Saintfoin. A bear came to the cave's mouth, and by thrusting his head in, shut out some of the morning's light, while he peered down with friendly and expectant eyes.

"Look at that stupid old Bruin," Saintfoin laughed. "He punishes me with his friendship for having called off from his head a swarm of bees." But Saintfoin gave her friend, the bear, a pleasant nod, and set for him upon her floor a hollow gourd full to the brim with honey. Feeling his way carefully down the rock, Bruin came in and breakfasted.

It was not easy for Sir Aylevan, in the kind little child Fairy's cave, to keep his pot of passion boiling. Saintfoin was at work, like a good housekeeper, upon the furnishing of breakfast for her guests. To the bear and the butterfly she was alike a friend. The race of giants was devoted to her service, and the leveret slept free from care under her roof.

"Let your lance rest," said the Fairy to Sir Aylevan. A wave of her hand covered the table with a breakfast of sweet fruits, fresh milk, bread white as milk, and wine that glowed as if a summer-day had been dissolved in it. "We must all breakfast, Father."

"But your wrongs, your wrongs——"

"Ah! Father Aylevan," she answered, "evil suffered carries lighter pain than evil done. If it be true that Madam Pidge bore my shape for a week in presence of our good Titania, she paid a full price for the luxury of so much spite."

"What price?" the Knight asked.

"Her whole Fairy life beyond. Within six years, or instantly upon the touch of some herb—what it is I do not know—she must become a Bat, to live a bat's life, and to perish as a bat. Let her alone! If she has wronged me, she has paid her price. And for the harm she has done you, why care? I can rebuild your house."

"She shall vex earth no more!" shouted Sir Aylevan. "Where is she?"

"Overhead," answered Hayo. Saintfoin started and shrank. "We have traced her to a nest above this cavern. My mates are outside, keeping an eye upon her."

"She is there for mischief to your little mistress," said the Knight. "This must not be. Give me my lance, and let us go. I will look in at once on Madam Pidge."

The wise little Fairy had a wholesome faith in courage. When Sir Aylevan, with Hayo for his squire, scrambled up out of the cave, she sat down on the heather, rested a little hand on the neck of a fawn that came towards her for a fondling touch, and thoughtfully looked down upon the heather blossoms. The morning sun, that had been struggling through a cloud, broke loose, and darted a bright ray across her golden tresses. She would save Sir Aylevan, if harm should threaten. As for Madam Pidge, she was, of course, safe from the thrust of mortal spear.

"Stay here," said the Knight to the giant, when they were outside the cave. "Only raise me upon your shoulder until you can thrust me head first into Pidge's hole."

Hayo, faithfully doing as he was bidden to do, shot Sir Aylevan head first into the dwelling-place of Madam Pidge. The descent within was steep, and the Knight fell heavily. When he arose, fierce with wrath, he found that he had fallen at the feet of Madam, who was sitting with a live toad half-skinned in her lap.

"Ah! here you are," she said. "I knew you would come to spend a long day in my little place, and, as you see, I am just preparing dinner."

CHAPTER III.

EVERYBODY GOES TO COURT.

THOUGH Madam Pidge had been a very short time in her chamber, she had made it very loathsome, and all that he saw in it made the good Knight more angry. "Go on," said Pidge, when he reviled her. "Make festival, and spare not. Foul words, you know, are meat and drink to me. But tell me, who killed my off leader?"

"If that creature was in your power," the Knight answered, "Spinner though he was, I can forgive myself for having put him out of pain. You are my prisoner." Pidge laughed in scorn, and he went on with fury: "You defile a woman's shape! But you have shape of woman, and I cannot strike! You are my prisoner! Here, in your den, I take you!"

"In my den, Knight, it is I who take you," Pidge answered, with a sneer. Then leaping up to the entrance near the roof through which Sir Aylevan had tumbled, "I yield to you," she said, "this room, and, that you may not refuse my gift, will lock the door behind me as I leave. Pray eat whatever you find in my larder. I shall go and quarter myself upon Saintfoin. But, wait. What do I see? Ho, ho! Sir Knight. You came up against me with a host of giants at your back. Let them look to themselves!"

There were by this time a hundred giants engaged in the siege of Pidge's nest, and Hayo was their general. By his order they were amassing heaps of all the herbs that grew in and around the forest, because he had picked out of Saintfoin's story the important fact that there was some herb which, if it touched Madam Pidge, would put an end to all her troubling. His plan was that, when she appeared, his big brethren should discharge against her at random every green thing that could be pulled. He hoped that some one of them would perhaps give her the finishing touch.

While Madam at the entrance to her nest paused, and looked down spitefully upon the stupid monsters lumbering among the pine-trees, carrying whole stacks of leaves, and herbs, and wild flowers, she was descried by Hoya. At the moment when that faithful giantess was covering her husband's baldness with the matted beards of the wild barley, she gave the word, and, as if whirled by a hurricane, the storm beat upon Madam Pidge. Away flew Adder's Tongue and All Heal, Sulphurweed, Sedge, Madder, Fern, Basil, and Bryony; after that were hurled Fleabane, Fool's Parsley, Borage, Nightshade, Goose Grass, Saxifrage, and Duckweed. Hog's Fennel and Hedge Mustard sang through the air, with Gorse and Mandrake, Pennyroyal, Ivy, Poppy, Thistle, Teasel, Toothwort and Timothy Grass, Vetch, Yarrow, Whortleberry, Hogweed, Nettle, Wolf'sbane, Purple Loosestrife, and whatever other herb was to be found. The younger giants, capering with joy, brought more and more ammunition to the field, and three times Madam Pidge was, by the hurtling storm, knocked back into her den.

"What do the louts mean?" she cried. "I would make stones of them, if stones could feel my revenge." Then she espied, in his yellow wig, Hayo directing the assault. "That is the monster in whose hair I was caught last night. He was in Saintfoin's cavern, too. Been thatching his head with wild barley, has he? Oaf! Every beard's point shall be a poisoned barb! Shout gaily till I come to you and change your music!"

Madam Pidge caused a mass of rock to roll over the entrance to her den, and shot herself like an arrow at the head of Hayo. A wild shout of exultation burst from the throats of all the giants, as a grey bat was seen beating its wings against their leader's ears. Praised in song be the wild barley! Wild barley was the herb. Now Madam Bat might fly her highest, she could not escape the long arms of a hundred giants. Twelve of them, falling on the rock, tore open a free passage for Sir Aylevan, while Saintfoin stood among the ferns upon the threshold of her cavern. Hayo must hold the bat in his hand tenderly, while Hoya wove for it a cage of twigs.

"Until midnight only," Saintfoin said, "this bat must remain a prisoner. Three blood-red hairs over the heart mark animals like this. And now my Queen may know that it was not her handmaid Saintfoin who defiled the air with slander."

The cage was soon made, and the bat safely imprisoned. But the giants were all sitting about the place, munching again at the pine-cones, and making holiday among themselves.

It was a day of ideas for them. They had thought of something else. They would escort their little Saintfoin back to Fairy-land, and see that she was properly received by Oberon. In vain their darling laughed at them, pleaded, and scolded. Being stupid, they had full right to be obstinate. Instead of yielding, they made matters worse. Saintfoin, trembling with tender expectation, longed to slip back alone, like a forgiven child, and receive from Titania the kiss so long denied. But here there were not only all the giants in the forest stubbornly determined upon going with her: all her friends were agreed to see her home, and break into the Fairy circle if she were repulsed. When evening came, the bear only paced about under the trees; he would not sleep. The butterflies and the birds struggled, by help of incessant chirping and fluttering, to keep themselves awake. Moonrise might have been sunrise for the stir of life that it excited.

Fairy Saintfoin, nothing doubtful of the gentleness of her own race, and having nothing worse to dread than kindly laughter, quietly submitted. To have gone to Court with none except Sir Aylevan and the convicted Pidge was her desire. But the will of the forest ordered otherwise. First, there were to march Hayo, in his wig of wild barley, and Hoya, carrying the bat in her cage of twigs. But the bear had his own private obstinacy, and considered himself, for reasons known to himself only, entitled to walk first in the procession. He argued his own right so fiercely, that they left him to his will. Bruin, therefore, walked first, looking constantly back, round the sides, and between the legs of the giant and his wife, at Saintfoin, who rode before Sir Aylevan, nestled within one of his arms, and, although it was moonlight, still having the figure of a child. Behind them there came tramping among the pine-trees the procession of the giants, and above came the light flying squadron of the butterflies, and all the birds, by whom the march music was played. It was not performed by them very briskly, for, in spite of all their efforts, they were sleepy, and flew often against the trees. Among the trees, on either side, ran a swift crowd of leverets and fawns and gentle creatures of the wood.

Sir Aylevan's red hair and yellow face, his green eyes and blue nose, seemed handsome in the moonlight, or it may be that there was something at his heart which gave a glory to his face. In the rich glow of all the love about her, Saintfoin's cheek flushed, and her heart throbbed with an eager, yearning sympathy.

The giants did not break into the Fairy ring that night. Before they marched into its glade, the Fairy revellers themselves had broken out of it. Saintfoin alone saw that the Fairy Queen stood in the path before them, until, when they were close to her, the bear lay down and licked the earth on which she stood. She held her hand to Saintfoin, who at once leapt as a tiny Fairy to her side. "I know," she said, "what evil I have done. Let the bat fly whither she will. Our wrong has not been done to Saintfoin only. If one Fairy can gather to herself out of the pine-forest this world of love, the pines are not so gloomy and the giants not so dull as we supposed. Therefore our Fairy ring is broken. Worthy giants, we claim fellowship with you; your wilderness shall be our home. To-night our revels will be held in Saintfoin's cabin." Then Titania laid her hand upon the head of Hayo, and his barley-wig flowed into hair that was the wonder of all giants and the pride of Hoya. And again, floating in the air, she laid her hand over the heart of Sir Aylevan, where Saintfoin's head had rested, bidding him turn his horse, and ride to his own house.

He turned and rode home in the moonlight, nothing doubting, and he found his home. Thenceforth he lived in peace. The frankincense of his heart was melted in a Fairy censer, and the world about him was the temple that its perfume filled. His home seemed to be lonely; he was ill-favoured, and sought no wife. But sometimes, when, after a day worthily spent, he sat at twilight by the embers in his great dim hall, he saw the silken locks of his child Fairy scattered upon his arm, and might look down into her deep blue eyes, glittering up at him with smiles or tears, or shining steadily with love. To Sir Aylevan, in his joy and in his sorrow, often there came the little Saintfoin, claiming right to nestle on his lap. So there was no place like that home of his, and no child dearer to its mother than that fondling Fairy to the Knight.

A LOVER OF JUSTICE.

"I wonder," said a Sparrow, "what the Eagles are about, that they don't fly away with the cats. And, now I think of it, a civil question cannot give offence." So the Sparrow finished her breakfast, went to the Eagle, and said:

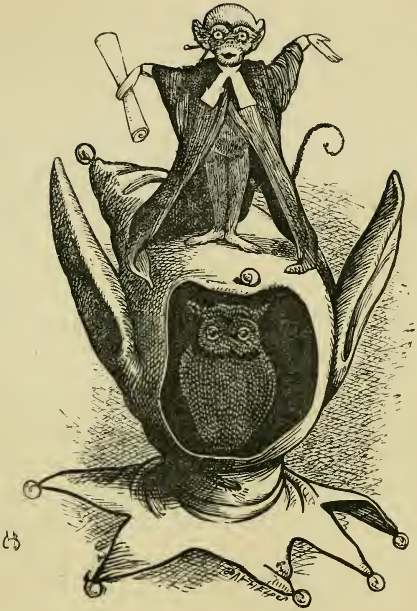
"May it please your royalty, I see you and your royal race fly away with the kids and the lambs that do no harm. But there is not a creature so malignant as a cat. She prowls about our nests, eats up our young, bites off our own heads. She feeds so daintily that she must be herself good eating. She is lighter to carry than a kid, and you would get a famous grip in her loose fur. Why do you not feed upon cat?"

"Ah," said the Eagle, "there is sense in your question! I had the worm, too, here this morning, asking me why I did not breakfast upon sparrow. Do I see a morsel of worm's skin on your beak, my child?"

The Sparrow cleaned his bill upon his bosom and said: "I should like to see the worm who came to you with that inquiry."

"Stand forward, worm," the Eagle said.

But when the worm appeared, the Sparrow snapped him up and ate him. Then he went on with his argument against the cats.



VERY COMMON.

“I WONDER you can stand it,” said the Ass to the Owl, who has an enormous character for wisdom. “Just look at your night-work!”

“Ah!” said the Owl, in reply, “if I had but your facility for public speaking——”

“Oh, yes; I can speak out in my rude way; make clamour enough when I suppose I have a grievance. But if you would learn oratory, go to our friend the

Monkey here. What fluency, what vivacity, what action! Our people may well bend their brows, and stop their ears, and ask, What can the Ass know? when I blurt out my feelings."

"Just so," said the Monkey. "You see, my dear friend, you are too obtrusive, and our brother in the ivy-bush is too retired. I avoid everything so vulgar as a cry; I mix with the world, and—ah—I think I may account myself one of its powers."

A weary man came by, carrying a heavy burden on his shoulders.

"Poor fellow!" said the gossips.

"Poor fellow, you may say," replied the man; "I've a long way to go, and only wish that one of you good creatures could find help as well as pity."

"Help," said the Monkey; "of course we will help, for we are all concerned about you. Put your burden down."

The man was ready to do that, and did it.

"Now," said the Monkey to the Owl, "pray, bring the powers of your mind to bear upon this load."

The Owl did so; examined it, perceived a hole in it of size sufficient to contain himself, flew into it, and made his observations. "I shall ascertain for you," he said to the man, "the character of this mass very shortly."

But the Monkey said, "Of what help will be all your abstruse contemplation? The appeal is, in such a case, immediately to the feelings." And so, leaping upon the burden as upon a rostrum, he declaimed with animation upon all the trouble that it gave. Sometimes his speaking broke upon the meditations of the Owl, and tickled him to short boo-hoos of laughter; sometimes the Ass lifted up his voice, and cried aloud.

Then said the man, "Unless we are soon moving, I shall not reach home to-night."

But the Ass told him to be at ease upon that subject. "Lay the load on my back, and show me where to go. As for the mere carrying, I can do that for you. But don't disturb my friend the Owl; what a head he has!—and let the Monkey ride a-top of all, and speak. Did you ever hear such a fine orator? Don't mention the trouble of their weight, for they weigh nothing."

The man then laid the load upon the Ass's back. The Monkey was left speaking on the top of it, the Owl sat in the middle, and the Ass plodded below. So the help really was given, and the man had to distribute thanks when he got home.

The Monkey he admired most loudly for his wonderful gesticulation and his happy way of fixing the attention. The Owl he declared to be the profoundest creature he had ever met. But to the Ass he said no more than, "Thank you, neighbour. I am much obliged to you, though I can see you have a very common sort of mind. All that you have done I could have done myself, as you know very well."

Playfellows.

Love children. Let the golden-haired be comrades with the gray,
These new-created spirits follow us upon our way,
Inquire their paths to God of us—as our first parents might
From lips of Angels once have learned to look into the light.

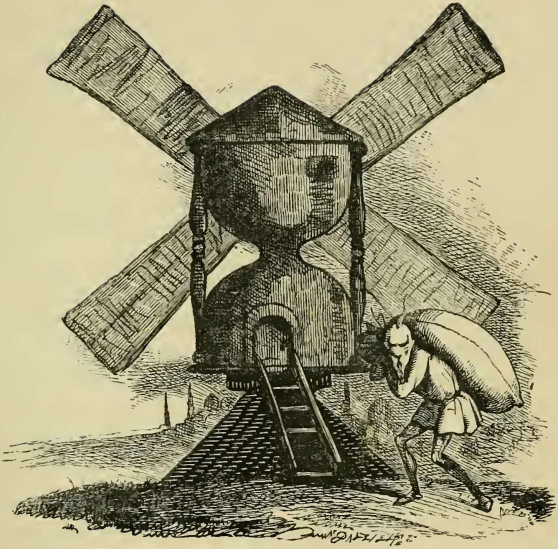
TOIL AND TRIUMPH.

Every beast has his worshippers. In the middle of the table-land upon the top of a steep mountain was a temple dedicated "To the Strongest of the Strong." A loose rock lay before the temple-gate, and in the temple was to be set up the image of whatever creature should have strength to get it down into the valley.

A thousand animals had come in turn and harnessed themselves to the giant stone, but had not moved it. Then the Lion came, and pulling mightily, dragged it with straining nerves across the level ground. He pulled until the weight was balanced by a hair's breadth on the edge of the descent. But then he paused. "Unharness me," he said. "If I descend another step the great rock will roll over me and crush me. I abandon the adventure." So said the Lion, who pulled well, but did not comprehend the art of pushing.

When the Cock saw this, he flapped his wings, uplifted his eyes, and crowed, "Fiddle-de-dee! What a noodle are you!" Getting behind the mass of rock, he flew at it, and the mere stroke of his wing was enough to set it rolling down the mountain-side.

The Lion shook his mane and stalked proudly to his lair. The image of the Cock was set up in the temple to the Strongest of the Strong.



THE FAIRY MILL.

CHAPTER I.

BLUNT'S MILL.

Once upon a time there lived a Gaffer Blunt, who was an honest miller, and the only one of all his nation, but he had no sons. He was a lean old man, with natural white, as well as flour, in his hair, with a bony, wrinkled face, tremulous hands, and tattered dusty clothes. Tear-drops often made little puddings in the corners of his eyes, by rolling themselves over the flour that gathered in his wrinkles.

Miller Blunt had an old wife, as honest, as lean, and as feeble as himself; but within their stooping, tottering bodies the old Gaffer and Gammer retained hearts as young and beautiful as that of the one child, the bud of their autumn, the plump little daughter, Althy, who would rather frisk with them than with the gayest of her child companions. Miller Blunt and his wife were children in their hearts. They starved secretly, and made great show of feasting, while they gave their substance to the building up of a brave child. They talked like merry babies for her entertainment till she was in bed, and then sat in the dark by the mill door, with nothing but their love to light and warm them. The old wife would hold one of her husband's hands between her folded palms, and they would talk together of the little one. So they lived over again in memory the joys and sorrows of her day of dawning life, reciting to each other Althy's whims and words, until they crept away to sleep, and dreamt of her.

These people occupied a ruinous old mill, standing alone upon a hill beside an inlet of the sea. There were other mills on other hills, but none so ruinous as this. Their owners took what they required out of the corn-sacks, and yet knew how to return them full. Below the grassy mount which the mill crowned were the rough stones of the shore, passing into a broad bank of mud covered only at high water by the estuary. From his mill door, Miller Blunt looked down upon a fort built to command the entrance to the harbour; thence he looked on to the great inlet of the sea, and the wide ocean from which it flowed. Across the peopled waves his eye dimly discerned a line of palaces and temples, flashing now and then from golden minarets a star-like spot of light. There lay the wealth and power of the mighty city of Favilla, chief town of the empire of that name.

"Only two pecks of flour to-day," said the old man one evening to the old woman, "and they will not be called for till to-morrow. Is there nothing, nothing in the house?"

The Miller's wife looked grave. "If it were not a sin," she said, "to take a handful from that bag, only to make a little cake for Althy's supper. I cannot help the thought, husband."

"What wonder?" said the Miller. "But we will not now, in our old age, depart from the just measure."

"For the first time in her life, supperless," the mother said; "and see how she is running to us hungry from her play."

The old man took the blooming child upon his knee. "You are ten years old, Althy," he said.

"Yes," she answered; "we are three old people. And I wonder how old is the mill?"

"A broken-down mill, darling, is it not?"

"All to bits," said the child.

"Not a broken-down Miller, too, Althy. Not broken down, with you upon his lap. If your mother sits by your bed, and sings to you, can you sleep to-night without your supper?"

The child quietly put up her arms about his neck, and would have sobbed, had she not changed her mood by a brave effort.

"Then," she said, "you must both put me to bed, and let us have romps."

Children are wiser than old people generally think. Althy raised the Gaffer and the Gammer into a high state of glee before she would begin to try to go to sleep. Then the old man came back into his cheerless room under the mill, and sat on a step of the ladder listening to the hum of his wife's voice as she crooned a sacred song over the child.

But there was no food for her when she awoke. That must not be. So, when his wife came out on tiptoe from the little closet in which Althy slept, still humming the tune in a low whisper, he began to button up his coat—cloak he had none—and told her that it was not too late to carry that small bag of flour home to its owner and get paid directly for the grinding. Then he could buy something for breakfast before Althy woke. That was good sense, and not to be gainsaid. The Miller, therefore, slung the bag over his old shoulders, and tottered away down the hill.

His wife looked after him till he was out of sight, and then perceived a soft light in the room. She turned and saw that where the bag of flour had lain there stood a Fairy.

"Your husband," said the Fairy, "is a Just Man."

"As just," said the old Dame, "as he is gentle."

"And I see that he has not thriven by his honesty."

"He has love and peace under his roof," the Gammer answered, proudly. "That is thriving."

"I will bring custom to his mill. It is no longer what it was this morning."

"Ah!" said the Gammer, "it was ruinous enough, but I have laid away my spectacles and cannot see where it is changed."

"From the Fairy Court to-night my gossips will fly abroad, spreading a rumour of the truth. You will have much custom to-morrow, and grind other things than corn. Whatever betides, fear nothing. Henceforth, this is a Fairy Mill."

The Fairy vanished suddenly, and Gammer Blunt looked for her spectacles; but when she found them, and had lighted a small pine-stick to assist her in her exploration, she could see no change whatever, and was very sure she had been dozing. As the pondering on dreams, like the telling of dreams, is idle work, she then began to look for the return of her husband, who came late, with sticks upon his back that he had stayed to gather by the way.

"Our neighbour had no money ready," he said, "and as our need presses, I begged to be paid in flour. He was angry, and will deal with us no more; but I am paid in flour enough to make a cake. We must rise early, Dame, and give the little one hot dough-cake for breakfast."

With that comfortable thought for their own supper, the Miller and his wife retired. It was usual with them, for reasons of their own, to breakfast together before the awaking of the child. So, when Althy had her breakfast of hot cake, there was a reserve of dumpling for her dinner, and of, at worst, some other form of flour and water for her tea. But to the new day would belong also, no doubt, some fresh morsel of earning for the maintenance of life in the mill.

After breakfast, mother and daughter set forth to a village two miles inland, to fetch a bag of corn from a house that gave a trifle of work to the old Miller on that day in every week.

The Gaffer went to meet the ferry from Favilla, by which, sometimes, there would come a heavy sack for him to grind. To-day, four warriors were in the boat, and when they asked, as they leapt out, for Blunt's Mill, and were told that he was Miller Blunt, suddenly they made him their prisoner and marched him up to his own door again. There was a fleet of state barges half across the water, and, in a very little time, the King of Favilla, with his glittering Court about him, and a troop of soldiers in gold armour, were also coming up the hill.

"Is that the Miller?" the King asked.

The soldiers who held him bowed to the earth before their master, and said, "Yes."

"Set your sails to the wind, my good man."

Trembling in the presence of so much splendour, the poor old man obeyed. There was a stiff breeze, and soon the mill was in full sail, grinding heavily at nothing.

"You venture to tell me that this is a Fairy Mill, which grinds up all that is false, and lets all that is honest pass unhurt."

"Sublime Lord," said the Gaffer, "no. This is a poor old mill that my father left to me when I was a boy, and by which I have striven hard to earn a feeble living."

"Hear me, my man," said his Majesty. "Seventy-nine Lords of my Court dreamt last night that this mill was become as I say. They were told, also, in their dreams, that the truth of its power might be proved upon the Miller himself, who was honest enough to pass without a bruise from between his own mill-stones. Seventy-nine Lords do not dream one dream for nothing. I myself, the King, I dreamt it, and I myself never dream in vain. This shall be tried. Produce the cat."

A cat, known to be false, having been brought in a bag for the purpose of experiment, was, by the King's order, cast into the mill, and came through it in the form of powder.

"Now," said his Majesty, "cast in the Miller."

With a piteous glance in the direction of the village from which his old Gammer and his Althy must be by this time returning, Gaffer Blunt submitted to his fate. But he came out from between the stones without a bruise. His hair seemed to have been newly combed, his clothes were smoothed, and the white dust had been brushed out of them; there was no other change.

"Miller," the King said to the astonished Gaffer, "I am your friend. Two trials more I have to make. Bring forward the diamonds."

A handful of diamonds, equal in size, twelve of them true, the others false, were thrown into the mill. The twelve true diamonds fell out unhurt, the rest rained down as a fine powder.

"And now," said his Majesty, "the deeds." An armload of written parchment, composed partly of true documents, partly of forged, was thrown into the mill. All the forged documents were ground to powder, but the true documents came out unharmed.

"Enough," said the King. "Present the bag."

A bag that chanced to be of the exact size and form of the bag in which he had carried the flour home to his neighbour overnight was then presented to the Miller, on a purple velvet cushion, by four pages in amber satin. It was bursting with gold coins as large as oyster-shells.

"You will receive such a purse weekly," said the King. "The nation rents of you this Fairy Mill. Nothing is to pass through it except on a warrant under our Great Seal. To your proved honesty we trust the direction of the works. Guards will be set at the door, and the fort below shall be strongly held for the defence of our state Oracle."

CHAPTER II.

SHARP'S MILL.

When Gammer Blunt came home with Althy, Althy trundling a bag of corn before her on a little wheel-barrow, there was a shining of gold armour and jewelled robes, and a waving of soft many-coloured plumes and silken pennons all over the hill; and up the hill there was the King folding the old man in a parting embrace, so that he was almost buried and lost under the folds of the royal mantle, which received upon it much stain of white powder from his clothes. The grand procession then marched down-hill to the barge, and its band went with it, piping, trumpeting, and drumming.

"My dream," said the Gammer, when her husband told her what he could understand about his morning's work. "Where all that gold is, stood the Fairy. Deary dear! What shall we do now with Madam Perk's corn? She must bake this evening, and the wheat cannot be ground by us without an order under the Great Seal! Couldn't you run after the King and ask him for an order?"

"I know what I shall do," said the old man. "I must ask Miller Sharp, on the next hill, to grind this wheat for me."

"But he will steal some and spoil the rest. The corn is in our trust, husband, to deal justly with."

"Miller Sharp," said the Gaffer, "will let me wait while it is ground, and will not quarrel if I give him one of these gold pieces."

So, in his own plain-dealing way, the Gaffer made a clean breast of his case to his neighbour, who congratulated him with warmth on his good fortune, and delivered himself of a long whistle when he toddled away in the direction of Madam Perk's house, carrying the just weight of honest flour.

But the King of Favilla was the happiest of men. He exulted and he chuckled over his new mill till dinner-time, and after dinner, as he sat in the midst of a heap of fruit on golden dishes, beside wine in jewelled jars and goblets, amused by lute-players and flute-players, and in company with all the chief men of his Court dressed in their best, he rose and drank, "To the regeneration of the State! Grist to the Mill!"

"Ha!" he said as he sat down, "we shall be deceived no longer in this kingdom. We shall send everything through our Royal Mill. Gentlemen of the Ministry and Privy Council, you will take precedence and submit to the test of truth to-morrow. We are assured already of your loyalty. For you this is but a form, in which it becomes the highest to set an example to those lower in estate."

"Hear, hear," said the whole Court, with every man's eyes fixed on the King. His Majesty, paying no heed to the hint thus given him, went on to say that he should expect every regiment in his army to be led in file between the mill-stones by the Commander-in-Chief and the great military officers. But, before the army, he would offer the test to the Church. Led by Archbishops and Bishops, all the clergy were to be submitted to the Fairy test. Then he would have the mill to grind over the members of the Great National Council. Then should follow the trade guilds. No time must be lost. The destruction of dishonesty throughout his land could not begin too soon or be carried on too rapidly. "It is our pleasure," he said, "to begin with the Ministers of State at five o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Would it not be inconvenient to your Majesty to rise so soon?" asked the Chief of his Council. "Our sublime Lord does not usually quit his chamber before noon."

"No matter," said the King. "We have evidence that the word of the Miller may be trusted. We depend on him."

"We are in ecstacy, sublime Lord, with this opportunity of putting our truth to the test, and will follow your Majesty even between the mill-stones."

"Follow me! Pooh!" said the King, "you know me well enough."

"It's a mere question of form," said the Chief Lord. "We all know that our sublime Lord is the most faithful among men. But how will the weak minds be strengthened when the becoming example has been set them by the highest in the land, and pledges of mutual fidelity are thus again exchanged between the King and People! Our master, as head of the Government, the Church, and the Army, will surely lead each section of the State in this path of improvement as in every other."

"You are quite right," said his Majesty.

"Are orders to be given that your Sublimity's barber be in readiness at three to-morrow morning, that the sublime breakfast be laid at half-past three, and that the barge be in readiness at half-past four?"

"Certainly," said the King.

And in that mood his Majesty retired early to bed, but in that mood he was not found by the barber at three o'clock in the morning. The sublime breakfast waited eight hours and a half. At noon his Majesty descended from his chamber.

"It occurred to us in bed, my Lord," he said to the Chief of his Council, "that it was not worth while to rise in the middle of the night for the purpose of giving evidence on that which everybody knows. Neither is it fit that we should show the faintest distrust of the gentlemen of our Court by asking for an extraordinary test of the fidelity they daily prove. In this emergency a question arises as to our royal self. I, myself, am determined to pass through the mill."

"Ah, Sire!" said the Chief Lord, "you cannot wound our feelings more than by the distrust of our reliance on your Excellency that you must show if you submit to the form of passing through this mill. But, alas! you are resolved."

"We are very resolved," the King said.

Then the Chief Lord went out and gathered all the courtiers about the breakfast-table, to entreat his Majesty that he would display so much confidence in the respect felt for him by all his subjects as not to afflict them. Afflict them he would, if he submitted himself to a test that would prove nothing more than they already knew, except his doubt of their true reverence for all his goodness and his greatness. Upon which, his goodness and his greatness said that, as it appeared they would not let him read his newspaper, in which he had found the report of a most excellent acquittal of a poisoner, unless he granted what they asked, he was forced to submission. Let them send to him his Librarian.

The Librarian came. "Load all my books," said his Majesty, "in wagons. Send them across the water to the Fairy Mill, and let them be revised."

"But, sublime Lord——"

"We will have no denial, no delay. If we do not send men in the flesh under the mill-stone, let them be tried as paper. Away! Is there to be no peace for us because the newspaper is readable this morning?"

The Royal Library went to the mill. After two days, his Majesty, about to ride out hunting, saw ten wagons loaded heavily with flour-sacks at his door. Then followed ten more wagons, packed to a great height with damaged books. Then followed the Librarian on horseback, tearing his hair.

"Sire, I resign!" he shouted, when he saw the King. "Behold the condition in which your books have been sent back from yonder mill! Some come with their covers almost gutted; there is hardly one that has not sheets or pages torn away or mutilated. The King's Library is reduced to half its size, and all that is left of it is in rags and tatters. It is a spectacle for honest men to weep over. Unless you hang that Miller, I resign."

"Peace, friend," said the King. "We shall now get a meal of knowledge from the pith of books. But what are these bags of flour?"

"The Miller, Sire," said a Captain of Guard, "would not suffer them to be left. It is the dust of the lost books, and he seemed to consider the obtaining of it the chief purpose of our grinding. He reproved your officers, Sire, when they desired to leave the flour behind, and take only what he called the bran."

"This is an honest fellow," said the King. "Fetch me a Trumpeter."

The Trumpeter came. "Go out," said his Majesty, "and proclaim our will that all the goods in the shops of this city of Favilla be passed through the Fairy Mill. As soon as these carts are unloaded, let them convey the goods of the shopkeepers to the water-side."

After a week, the King's breakfast-table was loaded with petitions, and his ways were beset with ruined tradesmen, groaning widows, and an angry populace.

"I am a lost man," said the Goldsmith. "You take, Sire, my chains and watches, and my services of plate, returning only dust."

"Doubtless," the King suggested, "your gold was of unjust quality, your powdered watches not what they professed to be."

"I am undone," said the Draper, "by the grinding and the tearing of that mill."

"There will be no food left for the people," said the Baker. "The demon mill has crumbled all my loaves."

"Doubtless they were not so pure as you would have had men take them to be," said the King; "or they were short weight. Sell honest bread, and never fear the Miller Blunt."

The Miller Sharp saw how the tide was running. Court and city were in utter desperation, but the King was calm. Though his books had been mangled, many of his State ornaments returned as powder, and a whole service of plate, fraudulent in quality, had been ground into flour, he was delighted with his mill. He had put, for that last matter, his goldsmith in the stocks.

Miller Sharp, when he saw how the public became more and more desperate about his Majesty's infatuation, called on the Chief of the Council, and made a communication to that dignitary. The Chief of the Council then paid mysterious visits to great Lords, who visited other Lords, and after three weeks of outcry and confusion, there was a wide wonderment in the palace. This Lord, that Lord, and the other Lord —seven hundred and ninety-three important people, when one came to number them—had all dreamt in one night that a mistake had been made as to the situation of the Fairy Mill; that Sharp's Mill was the one indicated; and that Gaffer Blunt was a trickster, who had been seizing plate and jewels in exchange for flour.

"The number of dreamers is great," said the King. "But it is strange that I am not among them. Let us try Sharp's Mill."

The State barges went again over the ferry, and the Miller Sharp found himself suddenly seized. He had already removed his mill-stones, and when told that he must pass through the hopper, made no difficulty, and came down through the free space he had made for himself, looking as honest as he could.

"Very good," said the King. "Produce the cat!"

"But Miller Sharp, knowing his Majesty's antipathy for cats, and having heard his neighbour's story, was prepared for any test of this sort. The Lords, who were conspirators with him, let the cat loose on the roof, while there was dust thrown before the King's eyes for his satisfaction.

The conspiracy, in short, succeeded. Miller Sharp buried his mill-stones in ten feet of earth, and let everything pass through his mill unhurt, to the delight of everybody: except when he could, without risk of offending men in power, seize for his own use some poor man's goods, and throw down dust for them as evidence that his mill really had discrimination.

Sharp's Mill, therefore, was praised of men. Gaffer Blunt's premises were searched; but as there could be found nothing that would convict him of a robbery, and the King himself had not dreamt of his dishonesty, he simply was deprived of all that had been given him and all that he had, except the mill. The weekly bag of gold was transferred to his neighbour.

Now, therefore, on many a night, little Althy really had to go without her supper. The old Gaffer lived by labour of his body; for his mill, clever as it was, would not grind wheat into flour, even if the old custom had returned to it.

CHAPTER III.

DUST.

Far away, among inland glades, the Fairies played under the Midsummer moon. Time slips but lightly over Fairyland. Seven years had run by since the good-natured Fairy, Twinkle, had been witness to the tenderness and honesty of Gaffer Blunt, and had obeyed a sudden impulse in rewarding it with Fairy power. Under the Midsummer moon, Fairies, for very idleness, were playing foot-ball with a grass-seed, or were climbing gossamer threads in the brake, when Queen Titania declared that there must be some active entertainment furnished for her. Then it occurred to Twinkle that a pleasant little expedition might be made.

So she cried, "Sheen, Glance, Mote, Flash, playfellows all, come! Do you remember when, the other night, seventy-nine of us carried dreams into Favilla? Dreams about an honest Gaffer of a Miller, when I made a Fairy Mill. What a Princess must that little daughter of theirs be by this time! Time! Why, she is seventeen years old! How proud the old people must be! Away! Let us all take the Queen seaward to see how the mill goes!"

Enough for light hearts is a little suggestion. Like a swarm of gnats, away the merry little friends of all good people flew. But her Majesty, when she set out, asserted dignity by giving herself size enough for comfortable riding on a dragon-fly.

When they came to the sea, across which glittered all night long the lights of Favilla, the moon shone on the rippling waters and upon the caps of sentinels pacing the walls of the heavily-armed fort; she touched also with silver light the edges of the windmill sails upon adjacent hills. One of them was old and lone, the other one in good repair, walled round, and guarded by patrols.

"Joy! joy!" cried Twinkle. "See how they take care of my mill. Let us all look in upon my dear old Gaffer."

All the Fairies entered Sharp's Mill by the key-hole; Titania went in also, leaving her dragon-fly outside in charge of Fairy grooms.

Within the mill there was a loud snoring. Drunk on the floor lay a fat, dirty, low-browed man, in costly clothes. Sacks of gold were about the walls, and there was a spreading puddle of gin on the floor, for the tap had been left unturned in the cask from which Sharp had been drinking.

The Fairies were in consternation, and were flying out again; but "Stay, playfellows, stay!" cried Twinkle. "This is no Gaffer of mine. Here is some terrible mistake. I must see to it; but pray, pray, pray don't leave me in this dreadful place alone. Go through the mill with me."

The swarm of Fairies flew about the place. They rose to the hopper, and saw that there were no mill-stones under it. Above it was a floor covered with what they all knew to be spoils of the poor. Though there was all the gold below, there were the spoils of the wretched stored above; the goods for which Sharp had thrown dust down to prove that his mill had in it strength for condemnation.

"To the other mill!" cried Twinkle. "Oh, I have been away too long; have neglected cruelly my own work. Pardon me, dear Queen."

Her Majesty having sent home her dragon-fly, the swarm flew through the key-hole of the other mill, and Twinkle knew the place; but it was wretched now, and empty.

The old Gaffer was to be seen, by the moonlight that poured through the holes of the mill-wall, tottering stealthily out of his sleeping corner with a ragged blanket in his hand.

The Fairies danced as gnats about his head. He groped his way, with the steps of a thief, to the cupboard, in which lay a fair girl, in old, worn, mended clothes, with a hay-rake by her side, peacefully sleeping upon straw.

Stealthily the old Gaffer spread the blanket over her, smoothed it tenderly and lightly with his trembling hands, then folded them together for an instant over the head of his Althy, and fled when a ray of moonlight suddenly fell on her sleeping lids. The Fairies followed him to the straw in which he lay with his old Gammer, in a corner of the floor, and heard him triumph in cracked whispering at his achievement.

"She will be out at sunrise, to go to the hayfield," he said. "Go to sleep, old woman. I shall be awake to take the blanket back before she rouses. She works hard and sleeps well. Oh, never fear me!"

"You go to sleep, old man," said Gammer. "I shall fetch it away in proper time. Why won't she consider that she lies alone, and nights are chill here by the sea? Poor child!"

"How she watches us and cares for us," said the old man. "What a pleasure it is to outwit her."

"I'm afraid," said Gammer, "that, as the gnats have come into the house, we shall have bad weather for the haymaking."

"Ah, dear, dear!" said the old man. "Go to sleep; we mustn't wake poor little Althy by our whispering."

"Is this your Fairy blessing, sister Twinkle?" asked the Queen, when the Fairies had flown up and down the mill, only to find it empty.

"Let us not rest," said Twinkle, "until we know all, and have set matters right again!"

"Our hands upon that," said the Queen; and all the Fairies, joining tiny hands, danced in a great circle round the mill before they hurried to the shore, and sped, in the form of a flight of sea-gulls, across the water to Favilla, where they again took the shape of gnats.

It was an hour past midnight when they all arrived at the King's palace, where a magnificent state ball was blazing. The gnats flew in, and darting hither and thither, with ears open to all talk, frequently meeting, crossing, and exchanging notes with one another, brought within ten minutes the whole truth to the ears of Titania.

"Good, very good," said the Queen. "Be of cheer, Twinkle! We ephemerals will teach these people something. As for your old friends and their daughter, they have kept a blessing in their hearts beyond all giving of ours, but they shall receive justice also from the Fairies. So shall that hog. Come hither, Fairies!"

All the Fairies gathered about their Queen, who was hovering over a bunch of artificial flowers in the head of a fair Princess. "Those flowers are beautiful!" said the young lady's admirer. "I observe that they attract the very gnats."

"I have noticed," said the Princess, "how many gnats there are this summer. The room here has been quite infested with them. But do see, they are all flying out as if they had some sudden business in hand."

And so they had. Titania had bidden them fly with speed of thought throughout the city, carrying into every house and every place of human resort, for business or pleasure, the words of a spell that would have over every work of man the power given to the Fairy mill-stones. In half an hour there was not a false thing devised by man in all the city, outside the gates of the palace, that was not fallen into dust. But when the gnats returned, Titania, who had remained alone within the ball-room, hovered over the King's head. His Majesty was leading forward to the dance the Princess on whose head a lover had admired the flowers.

Then the spell was spoken by Titania herself, and it was heard distinctly as a sharp and sudden wail by all the laughers and the dancers.

The King stared with terror when his partner's flowers fell in many-coloured dust over her face. Her gay dress, and the hoops below it, crumbled from an honest petticoat, while a white powder on her arms, and a red powder on her cheek, suddenly bred mites, that hopped with wonderful agility. His own ermine (woe be to the royal furrier!) was gone, and his royal dancing-pumps had fallen into tinder.

The music ceased abruptly, for the minstrels were aghast at the sight upon which they looked down. False splendours had fallen into dust and rags. Paste jewels, that covered the necessities of mighty dames, made emerald and ruby-coloured smears upon the brows and necks they had enriched. The rouge upon every cheek rotted and bred active mites, that danced over the unfair whiteness of round arms and naked shoulders.

Terror spread, the dance broke up into ragged and slipshod confusion. The thick palace-walls had, by a false contractor, been filled up with rubble. They began to yield under the Fairy spell, and as they were seen to crumble, with wild shrieks the guests fled from the ball-room to the outer air.

Ragged, half-crumbled carriages were there in waiting, and astonished footmen with their glories slurred. Much of the palace crumbled into dust; and when the Lords and Ladies of Favilla reached their homes, sad was the common spectacle of ruin there.

The sublime Lord hurried away to hide himself in bed, and covered up his head with the half-rotten bed-clothes. Titania poured sleep over his pillow, and the Fairies gave him in an hour more dreams than he could have repeated in a day.

"My lords," he said next morning to his disgraced and broken-hearted Court, when half the city was in ruins and the people were in revolution, "I remember a time when you had dreams and I had none; now, at last, I have had my turn of dreaming, and I know my duty. Fetch me the Miller Sharp."

"Report is brought, Sire, that he has been found dead in the Fairy Mill."

"Let the guns of the fort be turned upon Sharp's mill, and let it be blown from the face of the earth. The Fairy Mill! We have dishonoured its truth. We have accepted false goods, and see how they bring us to shame when suddenly they perish in the using. We have wrong to right. Freight a large ship with gold, for we owe long arrears of pay to Miller Blunt. My whole Court goes with me this morning to Blunt's Mill."

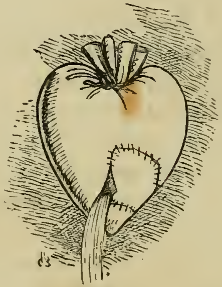
Then the King saw the plunder in the one mill, and the hog dead in his puddle. The guns of the fort were levelled, and Sharp's mill was swept from its hill-top. Within the rotten walls of the old mill he had forsaken, the sublime Lord saw enough to show how the extreme pinch of poverty had been endured by hearts fair, kind, and true.

"Gaffer Blunt," he said, "henceforth you are my brother. Gammer Blunt, you are my sister. Through your mill Favilla yet shall flourish."

And the city, honestly built, did flourish, for the test of truth was applied without fear to all the fruit of a man's labour. Very soon, therefore, few dared to meet it with a lie.

There was a brave and simple youth—he was not the King's son—who, suddenly and wilfully, when no man could be quick enough to stay him, leapt between the millstones to make evident the truth of his dear love for Althy; and he came out from his plunge fresh and beautiful as a maid from her bath.

The old folks lived to weep with joy together on their daughter's wedding-day. Soon afterwards they passed away, almost in the same hour. But when the Gaffer died, the old mill stopped. No wind would move its sails, and it fell altogether into ruin. But the Fairies were the playfellows of Althy's children.

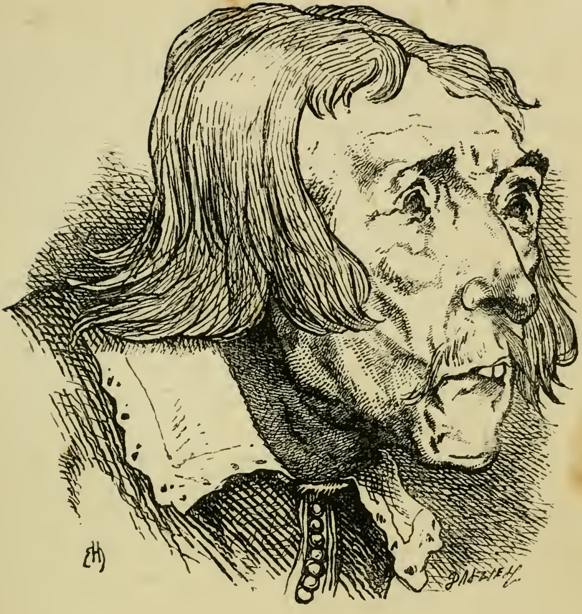


Nonsense Verses.

Living dewdrops glitter on the lawn,
Ride on leaves or cling upon the spray;
Each, an angel, smiles upon the dawn,
Laughing hails the advent of the day.

Man, else unprotected, to defend
From the accursed legions of the deep,
These the guardian angels that descend
When the world is sinking into sleep.

But when fleets the shadow of the night,
When each baffled demon with it flies—
Summoned by the kisses of the light,
Homeward floats that army to the skies.



SOLID THOUGHT.

Doctor Phantom was an Alchemist who had spent nearly all his life in looking anxiously at smoke that rose out of his furnaces, at liquids bubbling in his retorts, and strange figures drawn upon his walls with Hebrew letters scattered over them. He peered into all these results of his abstrusest reading and most cunning thought, expecting daily that the great discovery he sought would appear suddenly from one of them. But his smoke stung him in the eye, his boiling compounds burst their retorts, and the strange characters he drew upon his walls seemed to be charms that attracted to his laboratory all the rats, mice, beetles, woodlice, bluebottles, worms, and spiders within ten miles of his house.

Thus, after long weary years of watching, that had yielded him only daily disappointments and mishaps, Phantom acquired a habit of regarding everything as if it were a boiling retort that certainly might yield his Elixir, and was therefore to be watched most nervously, but that most probably was upon the point of exploding in his face, and therefore could not be faced without flinching.

"Thought! thought! thought! and this is the issue," said the dreamy old Philosopher one day, as he lay wringing his hand in the midst of the ruins of his furnace. It had just blown itself up, and with a flying cinder touched a jar of detonating powder on a distant shelf, whereby it was assisted in conveying Doctor Phantom's roof into the sky. Not a spider had gone with the roof. Not a bluebottle had been silenced by the shock that knocked the miserable Doctor down. For his spiders and his bluebottles, his rats and his mice, his worms and his beetles, and his frogs, and all the other creatures that were spinning, crawling, hopping, running all day long, and all night long, upon his walls and floor, and implements and clothes, were so many evil-minded imps and wicked Fairies drawn about him by his written spells.

"Thought! thought! empty thought!" he moaned; "I have been twisting my brains into spider's web with constant thought, and still have nothing in my grasp. Ah! would that thought were possession! Then how great would my wealth be!"

"You may have that wish," said a huge shadowy creature, rough all over with fiery hair. It stood outside the Doctor's laboratory, and, with arms folded on the top of the wall, was looking down upon him through the great hole made by the uptearing of the roof.

"Ah! ah!" cried the Doctor, looking up at him with curious scared eyes. "What thing are you?"

"A thing you have just loosened from prison. You melted my fetters, and I burst abroad. If I have broken your furnace, and pushed off your roof, I am quite ready to pay you for the damage. Shall I pay you with your wish—make you a solid thinker? Is thought to be no longer wearying desire, but swift accomplishment of all that comes into your mind?"

"Yes, yes."

"You are paid for the hurt to your roof, then," said the creature, as it vanished.

The Doctor hardly heeded him. "Yes," he went on, "yes, but—— Why are these spiders and things, and the very bluebottles in the air all motionless, all looking at me so intently? If they were away" (all vanished), "and I had my furnace again" (it was there quietly burning), "and if the roof were not blown off" (the roof was in its place again), "I might now discover the Elixir."

The Elixir of Life, with its name written on the bottle that contained it, stood before him.

The Alchemist's eyes flashed with a wild joy. "The Elixir!" he cried. "My hope achieved at once! Oh, I could hug my benefactor!" Blowing the roof in, the wild being entered the laboratory, and flung himself between the arms of the Philosopher. The poor man's knees trembled, and he thought he should sink into the very earth for dread, when down he went, as if a trap-door suddenly had fallen under him.

Stunned, amazed, deprived of thought, the Doctor sank, until a sense of suffocation raised a spasm of longing to be in the air. Then up he went, like an arrow, through the earth, and through the last hole in his laboratory roof. He brushed against an eagle, and struck off some of his wing-feathers, in flying as a bird-bolt up towards the clouds.

"Mercy!" he cried, when he could gasp. And as he thought, "Alas! alas! earth, air—I shall be plunged in water next," he was immediately in the sea.

But the plunge-bath cleared his mind a little, and he had wit to make home his next thought, then to think and have for his old home a palace, full of wealth, and numerous retainers, who were but his old friends, the worms and beetles in another shape.

"Who is my major domo?" he asked.

A round and most respectable domestic, in a brown suit, who had lately been conspicuous enough in the laboratory as a big-bellied spider, approached with respect.

"Let me have my meals served properly, at fitting times," ordered the Doctor. "I will take them in my bedroom. Let everything be so done that I myself may have no thought to take about the matters of the house." Then he resolved within himself to go to bed, and leave off thinking. Instantly he was undressed, and tucked up in his bed, an idiot.

But, as an idiot, his mind was tainted by his old vocation, and no magic power could hinder him from raving about the Elixir. "Elixir of Life!" was his cry when his first meal was brought to him, and he was fed with spoons by his attendants. The Elixir of Life instantly came in its bottle to his bedside.

Then the poor Doctor made a sign, which was interpreted as his desire to drink of the Elixir. It was poured into a goblet, and presented to his lips. The strong desire of his life in the moment of its accomplishment broke the bands in which he had confined his mind. He gazed at the cup, as he had gazed of old at his great bubbling retorts, with scared eyes of expectation. Shuddering as he took the draught of life into his hands, "What if it be Death!" he thought. And as he drank he died.

THE TOUCH OF NATURE.

"I AM brilliant," said a Frog, "and harmless, yet although I jump for joy all my life long, men will not be my friends. They give my name of Croaker to the dreariest of their own kind, and shudder if they touch my skin, though it is softer than a woman's!"

"That all comes of your being a reptile," said the melancholy Bittern.

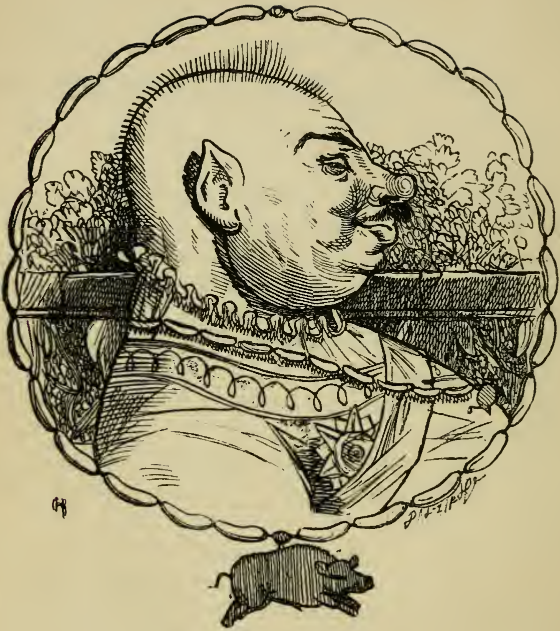
"But I am a gay reptile that hurts nobody and pipes away the night."

"It is not, poor creature, what you are that is the question. When they hear my boom in the waste places——"

"Yea," cried the Frog, impatiently, "what creature is more dismal than the Bittern? Yet men like to hear you!"

"That," answered the Bittern, "is because warm-blooded dreariness abounds among themselves. But you are a cold-blooded wretch. When they touch you they shudder as they think of their own reptile class, that is so slippery and does not warm under a friendly grasp. That also may be harmless as the frogs. I see little of men, and know only that they shrink from one another when——"

"Say no more," said the quick little questioner. "'Tis sympathy. How I should jump if I were touched by a warm frog!"



BACON PIE.

Once upon a time there was a great magician, and his name was Picrotoxin. His wife's name was Menisper, and she was not a conjurer at all, but no more than a simple, orderly, hard-working woman. Picrotoxin, being a great conjurer himself, did not want two of the same trade under his roof. He wanted to agree with a good housewifely soul, who would wonder at him and obey him, and with whom he could forget his magic when he pleased, and drop down—or it might be, climb up—into a happy human life. They had no children, and they lived in a lone cottage together, on a great lump of a moorland hill that had a large iron beacon on the top. In the grate of the beacon an old man, named Moonseed, the only other person living on the hill, lighted a fire of nights for the guidance of ships in a sea channel full of perilous shoals, currents, and tide-ways, from which the broad back of the hill could be seen when clouds were not too low. That hill was a huge waste of stone, lichen, puff-ball, and fern; of bog, moss, rush, horse-tail, and liver-wort, covering a tall heap of peat-bog, marshes, pools, and pebbly wastes of marl, cornstone, and red conglomerate, that rose and rose for miles about, until it came to a head wherein the clouds hung when there was any rain at hand. When the rain really came, it flooded the pools into lakes, soaked with water the great spongy marshes, and made of nearly the whole mountain a slough, over which the driving mists raced after one another, and the water plashed till only the wild ducks and the bitterns would choose to be out of doors.

Quietly on the top of this hill lived Moonseed, the beacon-keeper. Horses could jolt a wagon-load of wood and coal up the great slope in any but the wettest weather. Moonseed had also at his service a rough little moor pony, that helped him in the carrying of stores.

Somewhere upon the side of this hill lived Picrotoxin, the immensely powerful magician, and his wife Menisper. They had no settled address, for it pleased the great man to move house on the most trivial occasions. Sometimes his house slipped down hill. Sometimes he ran it round from one side to another, much to the discomposure of his wife. For Menisper was expected to do all that a good cottager's wife ought to do: to cook, to market, to keep fowls and a pig; and it was no small trouble to her, when she came from market, with a heavy basket on her arm, home to the place where she had left her house, and found that it had pleased Picrotoxin, in her absence, to move to the opposite side of the hill. If he had carried off the cottage, and forgotten to take with it the poultry and the pig, the poor woman had to take them along with her in a search over the mountain-side. Again, if Picrotoxin wished to keep his wife in her own natural place, and to solace himself in the intervals of conjuring with that happy pastoral life to which, as a country maid, she had been born, he ought not to have turned away from her hog's lard and fried potatoes, her rich soup of oatmeal and treacle, her hard buttered dumpling, or neglected to praise her bold execution of the favourite pie of the district, made of successive layers of sliced apple, bacon-fat, and onion, thick layers and plenty of them, covered in with a stout oily pie-crust. Her pies could be smelt out at sea when Menisper was baking them; and once a ship was wrecked in the channel below, because the pilot held his nose, instead of steering, when it was a pie-day on the hill-side. Yet Picrotoxin, though determined that his wife should market, make, and bake, was too much of a conjurer to eat the dinners she prepared for him.

This great magician had discovered by his art much that was doing at the palace, and among other matters, at what hour his King dined. Then fixing that as his own dinner-hour, when there was set before him one of these savoury tarts, he cried, "Goodwife, that is a pie for a king! The King shall have it. Up, pie, through chimneys to King! Open doors! In King's dinner to us!" Instantly the pie flew up the chimney, the cottage-door opened wide, and there rushed in a steam of soup over their table-cloth, followed by boiled, and fried, and stewed fishes, and fowls, and joints of many meats, tarts, jellies, costly fruits, and a great splashing of spilt wines. "There, old woman," said the conjurer, "a fair exchange. The King has got more than the worth of all this in your famous pie. Fall to!"

"Yes, husband," said Menisper, "you praise my pie, but you don't eat it. Besides, I'd have put in the biggest onions and more bacon, and put more lard in the crust, if I had known you meant to send it to the King."

"Never mind, sweetheart," said the magician, "you shall make something on purpose for his Majesty to-morrow. I rather like the thought of changing dinners; so, henceforth, you are sole cook to King Cocculus, and we will put up quietly with what the palace cooks provide. Don't keep any of these leavings. Feed the pig with what is fit for him, and throw the rest away."

So the King's jellies, and creams, and pine-apples were mixed with his cabbage and his truffles into pig-wash, and all his meat that Picrotoxin and Menisper did not eat was thrown over the moor.

Cocculus, King of Lardizabala, lost five pounds of his weight every week: one pound through vexation, and the rest through want of dinner. There was a State dinner the first time Picrotoxin played this trick, and that was one of the things the magician knew. Cissa, the treacherous Grand-Duke of Ampelos, a person most particular about his eating, was chief guest. When the soup was set on the table, suddenly it rose out of the tureen, and dashing itself into a double current on the face of the Grand-Duke, between it and the door, flew out of doors. "Sire, Sire," cried the cooks, running into the banquet-hall, forgetful of all proper decorum in their consternation, "all the dinner—all of it—has flown out of doors!" But while they spoke, there was an overpowering smell of onion, followed by the entry, through the chimney, of Menisper's pie, that set itself down, with a thump, between the Grand-Duke and his Majesty.

"This is strange! This is terrible!" said the Grand-

Duke, shivering from top to toe. "I recommend, Sire," said the Prime Minister of Lardizabala, "that we send for the bonzes." The bonzes were sent for, and declaring, for State reasons, that the pie came out of Paradise, where it was made especially for the Grand-Duke, pronounced a blessing upon all who should partake of it. "But the crust," said his Majesty, "is very black. It is well. That shall gladden the mouths of our bonzes." So the bonzes were obliged to eat the sooty crust, and the chief guests of the King ate Menisper's apple, onion, and bacon. Whatever else was brought flew out of doors, the wine rushing abroad out of every bottle as it was uncorked by the chief butler and his men.

The pie was praised, and much was said of the delicate attention that must have been paid by the Houris to the known daintiness of Cissa, the Grand-Duke of Ampelos. The Grand-Duke himself spoke never a word; but, on the day following, sailed back in a swift ship to his own country, smelling of onions when he reached it a month afterwards, and declared war against Lardizabala.

Now, when the second change of dinner came, and the bonzes, who had eaten enough soot, being sent for, pronounced that the black and greasy tablets of potato, mixed with cubes of bacon, had been chopped by demons, Cocculus and all his Court went dinnerless. Let nothing be said of the hard ten-pounder dumpling, or of the three red herrings fried with cabbage, for which the King's dinner was exchanged on the two next days.

Picrotoxin ate well, and he drank well; for it was only on the first day that, because of what he knew, the soups, gravies, and wines were made to travel without their tureens, boats, and bottles. Afterwards, royal soup-tureens, bottles, and decanters lay broken about the moor in which the happy conjurer resided; and the simple-minded conjurer's wife, sure that what her husband said was right, and growing to be proud of the praise he bestowed upon her royal cookery, adopted all the hints he threw out touching pig's-fry and other dainties with which she might vary the diet of her King.

At last King Cocculus, who had found comfort in lunch, resolved to dine no more. A hundred changes of his cooks, the padlocking of dish-covers over his dishes, every device that his Cabinet Ministers were able to invent, had been in vain. There was a standing offer of a thousand crowns a day for any person who could cook the King a dinner that would lie still to be eaten. Nobody had won that prize.

One day, Menisper's pig being fat, the good housewife was forced to admire him aloud. "See, husband," she said, "with such a pig outside his door, mightn't a king be happy!"

"Off, pig, and be doorkeeper to the King!" said Picro toxin. Menisper wept when the pig vanished; but her husband comforted her, and said, "Dear wife, I mean that you shall see your pig again; ay, and that you shall be thanked for your cookery by the King Cocculus himself, in presence of his Court and people. Lock the house door, and come out for a walk with me."

They locked up the door, and the house was immediately lost in a mist.

As they went down the hill-side, they were overtaken by a troop of knights in armour, who were carrying off Moonseed, the beacon-keeper.

"They are carrying off Moonseed without his pony," Picrotoxin said. "It is not far to Lardizabalon" (that is the name of the seaport capital of Lardizabala), "but we will ride." So the magician said three times, "C'up, c'up!" and Moonseed's little pony trotted down to them. "Take him by the head, wife," he advised. Menisper took him by the head. "Now hold him tight, while I pull at his tail." As the conjurer pulled, the pony stretched to the length of a crocodile. Then he pulled each of the pony's legs till they were longer than those of the tallest cameleopard. Then he broke a head of bulrush into three pieces, threw one piece over his head as he gave the animal the other two pieces to eat, and instantly the pony spread into a horse as stout as any hippopotamus. "Very fattening stuff that," said Menisper. "I wish I had known of it when I had the pig to feed."

"Now, wife, we are going to Court to see the pig and his King. Put your foot in my hand; here is a long arm —a long, long, long, long arm—and up you are! Now I leap after you, and off we go!"

"But how your beard grows!" said Menisper, as they jolted down hill with great strides, and at every jolt more hair seemed to be shaken out of Picrotoxin's chin.

"And how comely you are becoming!" said the conjurer; for with every jolt the wife seemed to be getting a fresh pound of fat upon her bones. "You will look like a King's cook by the time we come to Lardizabalon, and I shall look like the Prime Minister of the Moon."

"The Moon, man! Surely you mean of the moor?"

"No, wife. King Cocculus believes there is no man on earth so clever as himself. Therefore I will come down upon him from the Moon. Oh, never fear, I have a great work in hand! As for you, you shall see your pig sitting outside the door of the state council-chamber, and you shall be King's cook in the royal kitchen, and you shall be thanked by the whole nation for your apple-tart with onions and bacon. Look you, here is the great city, and here round the corner by the lighthouse is the channel that lies underneath our hill."

"Picrotoxin! Picrotoxin! What work is it that you have in hand now? What are you about? How everybody stops and stares at us and our great horse! How all the other horses and carriages have to run down the by-streets to make room for us! We take up the whole carriage-road. I feel big, I do, and I am going to Court as a proud woman this day?"

When they came to the palace gardens, the huge pony stepped over the gates and lumbered over the grass to the palace door, where he stood still. But then he was so tall that it was much easier for his riders to alight upon the roof than on the door-step. Therefore they stepped upon the roof, and Picrotoxin called down to the throng of lacqueys, who were wondering and running in and out, "Be so good as to let my pony loose upon the lawn, and tell King Cocculus that the Prime Minister of the Moon has come down to him with a cook."

So the two wonderful strangers walked about upon the palace roof, and when the enchanter came to the great chimney of the council-chamber, "This," he said, "is our way in." A Gold-Stick at the door was saying that a person calling himself Prime Minister of the Moon was on the tiles with a fat cook, and said that he was coming down to see his Majesty, when suddenly there was a terrible clatter in the chimney, and down Picrotoxin came, pulling after him, not very easily, for she was a tight fit, the round Menisper. Gold-Stick ran forward at the sight, leaving the door open, and Menisper saw that her pig sat on the mat outside.

"My chimney must have wanted sweeping," said King Cocculus to the new-comers. "What a large quantity of soot you have brought down!"

A man in armour of chased gold, and in a cloak of crimson velvet, stood before the King, and behind this man were five knights, each holding a leathern sack. Behind King Cocculus there was an open money-chest, from which a score of silken pages were about to fill the sacks. "There is exactly soot enough to fill those bags," said Picrotoxin. "Pay to your black enemy his tribute in his own coin, soot."

"What mean you, knave?"

"The Moon sees everything," answered the magician. "Be advised by the Prime Minister of the Moon, who has just brought down the right money due to Cissa, Duke of Ampelos."

"In your moony counsel," said the King, "there may be wit. Pages, put soot instead of gold into those bags!" But all the pages looked at their white doublets and their dainty fingers, to which gold might stick if it would, but soot was unsuitable. While they were hesitating, the knights closed the mouths of the bags, frowned, and clashed their swords; nevertheless the soot was in the bags, and the King's floor was as clean as the two strangers who had brought it down, and who advanced now to the royal council table.

"You were about, Sire, to buy a false peace," Picrotoxin said. "I have observed the doings of the treacherous Grand-Duke of Ampelos. It was high time for me to come down upon him."

"Thank you," said the King. "Then perhaps you will send my answer to him by this his High Lord."

"His High Lord!" cried the magician. "That ambassador in scarlet and gold was littered on the same day with your doorkeeper."

"The pig that haunts me!" shuddered Cocculus.

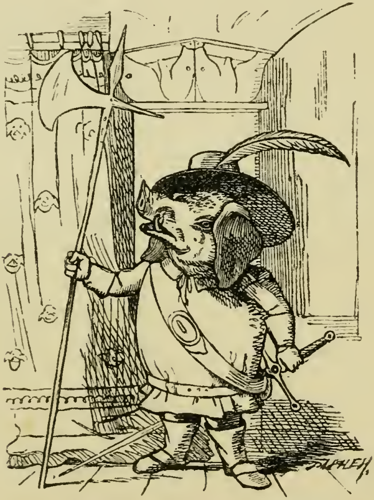
"This gentleman is Pork," said Picrotoxin. "If he and his five knights do not confess the cheat upon your senses, they shall be sent home as sausages in chains."

Then the ambassadors fell forward on their hands and squeaked, "It is true, Sire; we are pigs."

"I had a fit doorkeeper to wait on such ambassadors," the King replied. "But whence came that doorkeeper? Is he, too, from the Moon?"

There was a clatter of arms outside. Word was brought that the King's knights had found the person who must be concerned in the magical thieving of the royal dinners. The Beacon Hill was covered with the broken pieces of the royal crockery and bones of the King's meat. The only man upon the hill was captured; and they brought in the old keeper of the beacon.

"What is your name, fellow?" the King asked.



"Moonseed."

"Moonseed! Are you from the Moon, too?" cried King Cocculus. As he spoke there was a great crash of glass; for Moonseed's enlarged pony being upon the lawn outside, and tall enough to look in at all the palace windows, had spied his old master. So he thrust his enormous head through all the glass in the council-chamber, and began to lick the old man's hand.

"I am not awake," said Cocculus, falling back into his throne with the face of a man who is giving up a riddle.

"I am in bed after a supper of too savoury pork-pie, and soot had fallen on the crust. I am asleep with the Moon shining on my face. Are these men pigs?"

The knight from Ampelos and his five attendants, each holding a bag full of soot, again fell on their hands and squeaked in concert, "We are pigs!"

"What awful horse is that?"

"He has," said Moonseed, "the eyes of my little pony; but if he be my pony, he has grown out of all knowledge."

"Is that a pig who waits outside the door?" asked Cocculus. At a glance from Picrotoxin, Menisper's pig stood on his two hind-legs, advanced to the King's chair, bowed respectfully, and said, "I am."

"Gentlemen and pigs, and Ministers of the Moon and Moonseeds," the King groaned, "pray make yourselves at home. Help! help! Somebody carry me away, or wake me!"

Then Picrotoxin advanced, and bowed low before his Majesty. As he spoke he had pig's eyes and cheeks, and a round moist snout over his beard.

"Be assured, Sire," he said, "that the interests of Lardizabala and of your august person are being watched. What you behold now is a great political crisis."

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" the poor King groaned; "my head begins to ache."

"A State," said Picrotoxin, "may be saved in many ways. Complexities of the political machine that puzzle a bystander——"

"Stop!" said the King, suddenly. "Did you not say that you had brought a cook? I see a gleam of light. By help of that cook may I dine to-day?"

"May it please your Majesty to smile upon your cook," said the enchanter, bringing forward his good wife Menisper.

"She looks," said his Majesty, "like a king's cook."

Menisper curtsied with a happy smile. "Let her command the kitchen, and produce for me to-day her choicest dish. I ask but one dish, and that it will stand before me until I have eaten it."

"Sire, it shall be so," said Picrotoxin.

"May it please your Majesty," then asked a knight, "what are we to do with the enchanter Moonseed?"

"Prime Minister of the Moon, advise us," said the helpless and bewildered King.

"Let him mount his large horse, and ride swiftly through the land, commanding all your liege subjects to save their bacon, and to bring it to the royal commissioners whom you will presently appoint to buy up all the bacon in the land."

"Buy all the bacon in the land of Lardizabala! Is there a State reason for that too? Be it so. Prime Minister of the Moon, do as you will, say what you will to these ambassadors. Cook, dinner at six!"

The King retired to his inner chamber, and then trotted after him Menisper's pig to take up a new station at his closet-door. The envoys from Cissa, Grand-Duke of Ampelos, were treated like pigs and dismissed. Moonseed was despatched on the great pony to command all people in Lardizabala to save their bacon, and also to outbid private consumers in the price offered by his Majesty King Cocculus for onions and apples. Menisper retired to the kitchen and prepared her choicest dish. While it was baking, Picrotoxin called her away to smell—though she thought them less fragrant—the flowers in the garden.

Half an hour afterwards, a little crowd of knights and scullions, carrying a man who seemed to be in a swoon, clamoured at the door of the royal closet—"Sire! My lord! State news! A paper! A traitor!"

The King opened his door, and the little crowd rushed in, some carrying the almost lifeless stranger, one holding out six seeds, another holding out an open letter.

"Your Majesty's dinner was baking in the oven——"

"Yes, good, yes."

"Yes, Sire, your pie was in the oven, and the new cook had gone out of the kitchen——"

"Oh," said the King. "It is to be a pie, then!"

"Yes, Sire, and nobody was by, may it please you, Sire, when this man crawled out of a large fish-kettle in which he had been hiding, leaving the lid off and his coat and hat in it, and in his coat-pocket was his pocket-handkerchief, and in the lining of his hat there was this letter."

"Yes, Sire," said he who held the seeds, "and in his hand were these six seeds, like peas. And in the letter we find they are deadly poison."

"Yes, Sire," cried two or three of the crowd who held the man, "and here is the assassin who crawled to the oven where your pie was being baked; but when he opened the oven, the stink of the pie knocked him down, and so we found him."

"What do you say?" the King cried, aghast. "The stink of the pie!"

"Yes, Sire, tremendous. We are not sure that the man will recover."

"Good gracious!" said Cocculus, with a groan of despair; "the oven-door has been left open, and I smell it myself. It may be smelt all over the palace. It is like that pie of apple, onions, and bacon that came down the chimney once or twice."

"The letter, Sire, the letter!" said the man who held it. "Somebody read it to his Majesty!"

Somebody read as follows:—

"Eminent Hog,

"The attempt you made on my behalf to poison Cocculus and all his Court, by rubbing candril-seeds over the inside of the soup-tureens, gravy-dishes, and decanters, on the occasion of my giving him the honour of my company to dinner, I find to have been frustrated by a powerful enchanter, who now fights against me. He it was who splashed the poisoned soup across my face, who forced us to eat that which is our own flesh and blood, and caused our lips to have been embittered in vain with the antidote that would have enabled us to drink, unharmed, the candril poison. That enchanter lives upon the Beacon Hill that is beyond Lardizabalon, and against him vengeance is sworn by the whole fraternity of swine of Ampelos, to which you belong, and of which I, Cissa, Grand-Duke of Ampelos, am the Grand Master. His time will come; our ships are nearly fit for sea; and the magician on the Beacon Hill shall save from our wrath neither himself nor the State of Lardizabala. But first it is fit that King Cocculus be poisoned secretly; for which purpose I send you candril-seed, and require that you find some place of hiding in his kitchen, and there lurk until you find an opportunity of poisoning his meat. I have sent threats to that king, with demands for tribute. If he pay gold, the gold is yours when you succeed, and will be held in trust for you by the faithful brethren who are charged with this mission. Should you be taken prisoner, find means to gain time for yourself. The invasion, for which we are now almost prepared, will turn the blood of Cocculus to ditch-water."

"What astonishes me most," said Cocculus, "is that a person should have thought it necessary to add poison to a pie like that I smell. But what? what? what? I have smelt such a pie before. Ha! ha! I have an idea! Sound trumpets; all the world shall know it."

Trumpets sounded in the palace and the courtyard, heralds went into the city to proclaim by sound of trumpet, "His most gracious Majesty the King of Lardizabala has an idea!" All the people, and especially the newspaper reporters, flocked into the squares to hear it; and in half an hour the words spoken in the royal closet were trumpeted forth in the streets; and they were these:—

"WHOEVER MADE THIS PIE, MADE THAT PIE!"

Public opinion in Lardizabala had long come to the conclusion that political affairs were in a complex and peculiar position. The order to save bacon had been discussed hotly at public meetings; and the interference by the State with ordinary rules of trade, in buying up onions and apples at a price much above the market value, though it had been lauded highly by the Government newspapers, was denounced as profligacy by the Opposition press. But what was to be said for or against the King's idea, "Whoever made This Pie, made That Pie," none but the most wonderfully well-informed of editors could tell.

While King Cocculus was agitated with his great idea, and causing messengers to be sent for the new cook, and for her introducer, the Prime Minister of the Moon, Menisper's faithful pig, who sat at the door of the King's chamber, was seen to be shedding tears. The half-poisoned prisoner had been placed on the ground, and was there slowly recovering his breath. As he aroused he often looked towards the pig sitting outside the door. At last their eyes met, and they rushed towards each other, with loud cries of "My brother! My own long-lost brother!"

"We were of one farrow, Sire," explained the faithful pig; "pardon these tears!"

"Oh, brother!" said the hog who had been misled into the paths of crime, "I repent of all my wickedness now that I have your love to reclaim me. On your breast I will pour out a full confession of these plots." So, lying with his head between his brother pig's fore-legs, in a repentant attitude, the prisoner told, in the presence of King Cocculus, a dreadfully long story, chiefly about the part he had himself taken in the rising of pigs in the Grand-Dukedom of Ampelos, after his brother had been sold to the foreign merchant of whom Menisper had bought him when he was a tender pigling. The greatest of the hogs knew a hog who was descended from the men turned into hogs by a great enchantress, many thousand years ago, and he had got from him the name and address of that enchantress. Then, through some toils, he had found his way to her, and obtained from her a charm that would turn pigs into men. Thus all the pigs in Ampelos had become men; and rising in revolt, they had placed Cissa, the greatest hog, upon the chair of the Grand-Duke. Among themselves they had divided, with much quarrelling, the chief places of trust in the State. At Cissa's Court were greed and gluttony. From devouring victuals, the Grand-Duke turned to devouring States; and he was on the point of annexing Lardizabala, after poisoning the King at a friendly banquet given to himself, when the poisoned soup was dashed into his own face, and, by some unknown power, he was forced ignominiously to eat pig.

The penitent creature who told this and more was in the middle of a list of treacheries, when Picrotoxin and Menisper entered.

"The King's dinner is cooked and served," Menisper said.

"Prime Minister of the Moon," said Cocculus, "before I attempt to dine upon the pie that saved the State——"

"That is to save it, Sire," said the enchanter.

"That has saved it, I tell you," cried the King, impatiently; "for has it not saved me? I publicly thank this cook that you have brought me, for her morning's work." Proud woman was Menisper then. "That repentant creature and his brother may be united as one household henceforth in a royal sty. I will not punish him, or make him into bacon."

"May it please your Majesty," said Picrotoxin, "you shall prosper in pigs all your days, if you will meet as I advise you the invasion that is threatened."

"Speak, Prime Minister of the Moon!"

"Let all the coasts—except the coast of the channel underneath the Beacon Hill—be fortified with bakehouses, and mount in each bakehouse a heavy battery of iron ovens. Let the bacon that has been saved, the onions and apples that have been bought and stored in your arsenals, be distributed among the bakehouses and made into pies like that of which you know. When the enemy's fleet is seen to approach the coast at any point, let the ovens be loaded with the pies, and let the fires be lighted; let the pies bake till the ships draw near, then let the oven doors and all the seaward doors of the bakehouses be suddenly flung open. Thus drive the foe away from every point, except the shore under the Beacon Hill; then leave the rest to me."

"Absurd!" cried the King. "Bombard an enemy with such a smell as that! It would be barbarous; it would be against all rules of civilised war. But I owe much to the pie, and I will show my gratitude by dining on it, if I can."

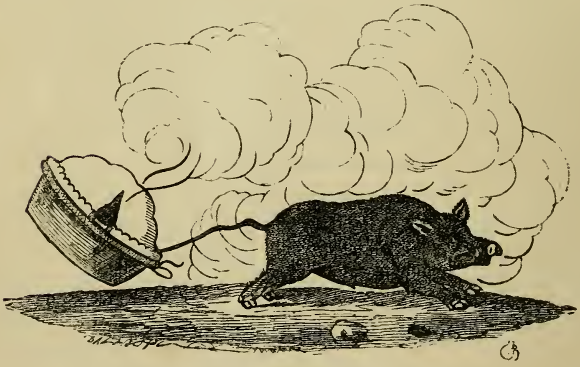
The King went therefore in procession, with the usual sound of trumpet, into his great banqueting-hall, where the pie he knew of stood alone on the great table, and was growing cold. "Somebody carve!" said the King. "May it please your Majesty," said the Lord Steward, "my health is delicate, and I dare not." Nobody dared. "Poltroons!" the King said, "look at me." He thrust his knife into the pie and turned pale. Reflecting for an instant, he with a rapid hand cut a small slice out of the pie, then turned and fled in the rout of all his attendant courtiers and lacqueys who fled with him, pressing their hands tightly down over their noses. He was gasping for breath when he met Picrotoxin. "Order the batteries," he said; "your notion was not at all absurd. If the opening of the ovens be not enough to repel the enemy, open the pies upon them! open the pies!"

Batteries like these, terrible to a man, might well strike dread into the Armada of pigs. Under lead of Cissa, the Grand-Duke, a mighty host of ships brought all the fraternity of which he was Grand Master to invade the coast of Lardizabala, but upon no point dared they approach land, till it was discovered that the straits below the Beacon Hill were undefended by the batteries that bristled everywhere else. Into those straits at high water the fleet pushed, and therein at low water every ship was stranded that had not already run aground. The beacon-keeper was gone, and there was no light to direct a pilot. In the night Picrotoxin stalked alone over the moors, and from the summit of the hill rolled down by mighty spells cloud after cloud that covered the lost ships with a thick darkness. Then he gathered fernseed, and when he had filled with it his peaked cap, let his cloak fly with the gale, and rode in it upon a whirlwind of his own raising three times round the fleet, scattering the seed that dropped like points of living fire into the darkness.

Among the ships word had gone forth from Cissa, while the darkness gathered, that this was the work of the enchanter on the Beacon Hill, who had been warring against him, and against whom he had been warned. The Beacon Hill must be stormed at daylight, the enchanter seized and killed, the finest possible position taken for a military camp which would command Lardizabalon, the enemy's capital. It was so natural to these creatures to feel themselves pigs, that they hardly knew how changed they were in outside character when, as a vast herd of swine, they all plunged through the water, gained the shore, and stormed the hill next morning. It was now walled round, but there was an open gate on the sea front through which the pigs rushed, with the greatest of hogs, Cissa, at their head. Cissa had mounted to the beacon before the last of his army had passed through the gate, and then the gate was shut.

So the huge hill was covered (as it is to this day) with the finest herd of swine that any man in the world has ever seen; and Picrotoxin gave the whole herd to his King. The pigs were wild for a few weeks, but a sufficient number of swineherds having been appointed, they were in good time brought into subjection. Menisper was, on a day appointed for the purpose, thanked by the King, before his Court and all his people, for her famous pie. The nation gave her seven pigs of gold.

Thus it was that her clever husband brought her cooking to honour; though he did not himself like to eat her pies. Many such pies have since been made from the pigs of the herd upon the Beacon Hill, for which reason, and as a memorial of the service they had done, they are to this day called Beacon Pies by many people thereabouts.



A PATTERN OF DIGNITY.

A CLEVERLY invented bird, that plumed itself and sang deliciously, was treasured under a glass case. A real bird in a cage who lived with it was well content to be less noticed. "My remarkable friend," he observed, "has the glass case always kept over him. It is to me only that people look for answer to a chirrup of their own; and I'm the bird that gets the seed and sugar."

A scholar overheard this shrewd soliloquy. "Bird," he said, laughing, "I perceive you are a philosopher. Solve me a problem. Tell me where to look for dignity. It is a thing I want."

"Look straight before you," said the bird. "I have it."

"You, indeed! Hopping, twittering, swinging yourself on your perch claws uppermost!"

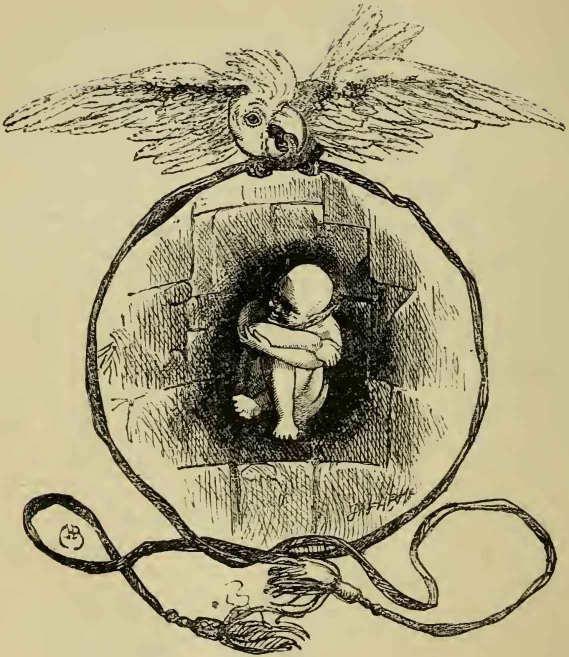
"I am true to my own nature, man, and true to the bright heaven for which I was born. Does your pride want anything more or less? Apply to Clockworks, yonder, under the glass case."

"But, my good bird," said the questioner, "what if I also long to swing in my cage heels uppermost?"

"Then show your sense, and do it. Look at me!" Down the bird went, and up again.

"It would ruin me to do that," said the scholar.

"I flatter myself," chirped the bird, "that it would ruin Clockworks. Who put *you* together?"



SILVER TASSELS.

THE only ailment to which good Fairies are subject is an affection of the fancy, whereby they grow mad for mischief. A Fairy so altered is called a Rogue Fairy; and the Rogue Fairy, usually a male, will often separate himself from his own circle, and, looking for a solitary den of his own, fix himself, perhaps, as the Rogue Splug did, in a chimney.

The Rogue likes a nest in a chimney. He can drop smut into the pot, or blow the smoke into the house, as often as he pleases, and has all the household at his mercy.

Splug lost his temper over the doings of his friend the little Fairy Teasel, who had forgotten herself so far as to go as companion to the Queen Cockatoo. He might have gone to the same magnificent Court with her, and distinguished himself in the service of King Cockatoo—a brilliant sovereign, though not so powerful as his forefathers had been—but he was cross, and chose rather to go and live in a chimney. He was so very cross that there was no living for human creatures in the sweet little cottage of which the chimney was in his possession. Soot always fell at the times when a fall of soot would do most mischief; the cottagers were made to look like sweeps; and when the sweep himself came up the chimney, he was tickled till he sneezed the soot-flakes about like the leaves in an autumn whirlwind. Long pots, short pots, crooked pots, cowls of all sorts, were fixed upon the chimney-top, but always tumbled and tore through the roof where they could clatter down on something choice. At last, the cottage was deserted, and the owner of it, my Lord Hemp, the hardest and the richest man in the whole realm of Gossamer, never went near it. For in the blackening of Hemp's face Splug took a particular delight.

The cottage haunted by this Rogue Fairy was on the outskirts of Feathergrass, the capital of Gossamer. My Lord Hemp, who occupied a house in the city nearly as fine as the Queen's Palace, was so grand a man, and in his own opinion so choice a man, that he was not without hope of marrying his sovereign, Queen Sappodilla.

Now, it happened that when the cottage had been for a long time empty, and when anybody might have lived in it for nothing who would undertake to make the smoke go up its chimney, there came into those parts a poor widow, whose name was Neroli. She brought with her all her goods in a small bundle, and ten gold pieces—all that her poor husband had been able to lay by for her before he died. She came on foot into the city of Feathergrass, with her bundle in one hand, and her little seven-year-old daughter, Silver Tassels, holding by the other. Mother and child were dressed in old clothes so well mended that you hardly might observe how many times they had been torn, and all their finery was on the child in form of an old girdle of silver thread, with a small pair of silver tassels that a godmother had given her. Neroli and little Silver Tassels walked up and down for some time through the scented groves and among the palaces of Feathergrass, in vain search for a place that they could make into a pleasant home. At last they sat down in a large public garden to eat their dry bread among the lilies which grew under the shadow of some blossoming orange-trees. As they sat a tall gentleman came by, sharp-eyed, sharp-nosed, and thin-lipped, with powdered hair, and a great deal of white muslin frill about his neck. It was my Lord Hemp going to Court, magnificently dressed in blue and white satin, trimmed with flowers, and with thick gold fringe on all the borders of his clothes. Neroli was very beautiful. She had, like her child, a wealth of sunny brown hair falling about her white forehead, and they both had faithful blue eyes that no living creature could mistrust. The child had the rounder cheeks; but child and mother were alike weary and white when my Lord Hemp stood still before them.

"A little girl that can wear silver tassels should eat cake," he said. Neroli supposed, therefore, that he was about to pull a cake out of his pocket. But he only added in a harsh voice, "Why do you give dry bread to such a child as that, and let her eat it here? Eating is not permitted in these gardens!"

"We have no home yet," Neroli faltered; "we have been looking for a room this morning. As for the dry bread, sir, we have but ten gold crowns in the world, and must not eat them."

"My dear woman, pardon me," said Hemp. "You have ten gold crowns, and you want a lodging. I am interested in you; and as I happen to have empty at this moment a very pretty cottage just outside the town, I will let you live in it. Pay me only the worth of one room as a little weekly rent. You will be punctual; I see that in your face. The payment is only a form, which it will be a pleasure to you to observe. You can earn money?"

"I hope to live by my needle. Therefore we have come to Feathergrass."

"My recommendation at Court you may rely upon. Allow my steward to show you the premises. If you were to pay in advance four gold pieces, the cottage would be your own for the first half-year, and we should be simply neighbours and friends. Afterwards the small rent might be paid weekly, for I know that way will suit you best, my dear young friend. Oxlip," he said, turning to the steward, who was following at the head of a troop of gilt servants in attendance upon the great lord, "conduct this lady and her charming daughter to the cottage of mine now so fortunately empty. If she will accept that as her home, and me as her friend, say for the next seven or fourteen years, see that there is a little writing drawn up for our mutual assurance. Madam, I kiss your hand. The Queen awaits me."

So Neroli and Silver Tassels came to the cottage, which was not far from the town, and as pretty a place as one might wish to look at. A grove of date-palms rose behind its garden, which was edged with scarlet cactus blossoms and sweet flowering myrtle. The road opposite its door crossed by a mossy wooden bridge a river of the clearest water, in which water-lilies opened their great blossoms and spread their floating leaves. On the other side of the river was a strip of flat ground at the foot of round hills covered with rose gardens. These belonged to the merchants who owned a great factory higher up by the water-side, where perfume of roses was extracted for the markets of the world. The runnings from the factory made rose-water of all the streams. The cottage itself was thatched with sweet flag; and, like most of the huts in the realms of Gossamer, was built of rough blocks of a fragrant wood that grows large in those parts. Only the hearth-place and the chimney were not of wood, but of sand, burnt, according to the custom of the country, into rough plates of a sort of fire-proof glass.

Here, then, Neroli gladly enough agreed to live for seven years to come, paying at once, for the first half-year's possession, four of her gold pieces; and bound to pay thereafter weekly rent at the same rate. Little was spent for furniture. She and her daughter slept on the waste rose-leaves, that cost only the trouble of fetching from the factory. She had little to buy beyond a table and two chairs, a tub and a basket, a pot and a kettle. The few clothes they had, and some small household necessaries, brought from the home lost by death of the house father, were in the bundle that Neroli had with her, and among the necessaries was a well-stored work-box, the poor woman's stock-in-trade.

Her plan might have been changed, and she might have found work at the neighbouring factory, but that was manned (if I may say manned) by slaves. The needlework she got was very poor. Lord Hemp, though it might have been worth his while to support the tenant he had caught, struck her off his mind for the next six months on receipt of four of her gold crowns. He knew that he could not advise the grand ladies of Queen Sappodilla's Court, which is the most handsomely dressed Court in the world, to send their rich stuffs to be made up in a chimney; for the cottage all the world of Feathergrass knew to be no better than a chimney when a fire was lighted in it. But the poor traders, who could afford Neroli very little pay, did, for love of her gentle face, and out of pity that Lord Hemp should have so cruelly entrapped her, give her what work they could; only in doing so they begged, with a puzzling earnestness, that she would bring it home to them clean, if possible.

This puzzled Neroli, because Splug was not in his chimney when she took possession of the house, and all about her was clean as a lily-bud. Splug, finding himself left without amusement, had gone off to try whether he could not break one of the tail-feathers of Queen Cockatoo, but had been seized on the way by an old Parrot, supernaturally gifted, who fastened a claw upon one of his little buttons, and talked to him for six months, till his head span round and round; at least, it span round and round so swiftly that the Parrot was made giddy by looking at what he had done, and his claw lost hold upon Splug's button, although with his beak he still was able to hold forth. Splug flew off, but his head continued to spin for another twelvemonth, so that he was too confused to understand whither he went; because, though he might be journeying straight on, what was before him in one instant was behind him in the next. At last he was recovered sufficiently from the punishment inflicted on him by the Parrot to discover his way back into his own chimney. When he entered it, smoke was ascending, and at once he eased his mind by kicking all the soot down to the fire, and blowing the smoke back into the house. Then he listened mischievously for the noise of scolding that had usually followed, but heard only two soft voices. So he peeped down, and saw a fair woman, with rich brown hair falling about her shoulders, and a poor old dress, sooted in front, who was pouring into a dish a few cooked roots out of a saucepan into which the soot had fallen. A pale little girl, who also had brown hair and wistful blue eyes, sat before an empty plate on the other side of the table, and said, "I am not hungry, Mother." With the faintest little quiver of the face, the woman shook her head over the sooty mess. "This does not look nice, does it, Silver Tassels? But you had no dinner yesterday. You must not say you are not hungry."

"I mean, Mother, I am not hungrier than I can bear." The woman and child kissed each other, and no more was said.

"Odd people these!" Splug thought to himself, and came down, himself very much like a lump of soot, to sit unobserved among the crickets, watching them. He could see that the child would have cried had she been alone, and so would the mother; but being together, one pair of blue eyes smiled into the other, and fond little words were said while the fallen soot was being cleared away. Then the poor mother took off her soiled dress, and sat down by her work-box with some coarse stuff, upon which she began to sew and sew for the dear bread, while the child lighted the fire again, stooping as she did so till her silver tassels almost came upon Splug's nose. The Fairy looked up curiously. "Certainly," he thought, "that girdle was made at Titania's Court. I have seen Teasel, ages ago, working upon those tassels. Pretty thing, truly, to wear them and want a dinner!"

When the fire was lighted, Silver Tassels made some water hot, and pouring it into a little tub, quietly began to wash her mother's only dress, while still the mother, sitting in her underclothes, with her brown hair about her shoulders, and her blue eyes as they were bent down filming with tears, sewed and sewed for the dear bread.

Splug ran up the chimney again, and came down on the other side as a poor wooden-legged soldier, who tapped at the door and asked for charity. "I have not eaten for two days," he said.

"Ah, friend," said Neroli, "neither has my child."

"Nor you?"

"Nor I; but that is little. I had my golden childhood, and may bear some sorrow now. But she—look at her!"

Silver Tassels, standing on a little stool, with cheeks not so round as they had been, was rubbing at the sooty dress, trying to wash it well with a thumb's-end of soap. When her mother pointed to her, she began a cheery little song, learnt in her babyhood.

"Well," said the soldier, "we are all three hungry, and the dates are ripe in the wood outside. I will go pick up some of the fallen dates, and we will make a feast together."

The child stopped in her song, opened her blue eyes to their utmost width as she looked at him, and said, wonderingly, "They are not ours."

"They belong to Lord Hemp, who owns the land, and to whom we owe to-day a week's rent for the cottage we are in," the mother explained; and it was clear to her that there was no more to be said.

"Oh, well," said the soldier, "Lord Hemp is the richest man in Feathergrass, and eats of the daintiest. He can spare a handful of dates to the starving."

"No doubt," Neroli said. "Perhaps I shall have to ask him for so much."

"I cannot wait to ask," said Splug. "Do as you will. I am off to the wood for my dinner."

As he was going away, "Ah, little daughter," said Neroli, "he must be hungrier than we are, or he would not think of that. He would not do it if we had anything to give." So she took her silver thimble from her finger, and following the lame soldier, pressed it into his hand. "The worth of it," she said, "will buy at least a piece of bread, and then help may come before you are again tempted to steal."

The soldier thanked her, and went off towards the town.

"Dearest Mother," said poor little Silver Tassels, when she came in again, "you work all the long day with needles, and without your thimble you will be so hurt!"

"Without my thimble he would have been more hurt than at the finger-tip. Ah, darling! it is hard for us, but think how very terrible his hunger must have been!" Now, Splug heard all this as he sat in the chimney, cross-legged and pot-bellied, with the thimble on his head.

A little later in the afternoon, there was a great rout of gilt servants on horseback scampering over the bridge, followed at full speed by a gilt coach drawn by six cream-coloured horses, behind which more gilt servants, all of them blackamoors, followed on foot. This was my Lord Hemp coming in full dress from his country-house to dine with Queen Sappodilla.

When he came by the door of the cottage, "Halt!" he cried; for he remembered that a week's rent was just due; and as he had been told that the chimney had not smoked since the new tenants went in, he was not afraid to go in himself and get the small morsel of money that was owing.

When Splug saw his old enemy come in, dressed in white and blue satin pranked with flowers, and wearing over his neatly-powdered head a crimson velvet hat with a whole peacock's tail in it, he chuckled to himself, but waited to hear what might pass before he began any mischief.

"Quick, my two florins!" said my lord, not taking his hat off in the widow's presence. "Quick, my good lady! The Queen waits for me!"

"Alas, sir, if you would wait——"

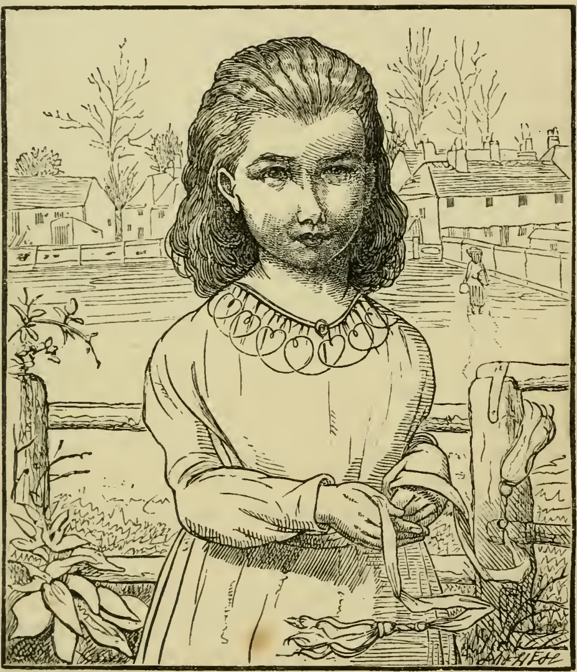
"Wait!" he cried. "Is not the money due to-day? Not got it; very well, that need not trouble you. What shall I take instead? I cannot put your pots and pans into my carriage; but see now, there's that silver girdle of your child's."

"Oh no, sir," the mother said, "not that!—at least, not yet."

"Well, there's your work-box."

"Mother cannot live without that," said the child. "Please take my tassels."

"They will do for next week," said my lord, as he directed two big footmen to put the widow's work-box into his carriage, first gathering up into it the scissors that had dropped from her lap when she rose to receive him, and the needles and threads that were lying on the table. And she, when starving with her child, would not have robbed him of a fallen date!



But Splug, in the form of a cricket, jumped into the work-box and jumped out again, leaving a charm behind. While my lord rolled home in his great coach, with the box that was the poor woman's hope of daily bread by his side, he was thinking of the elegant things he would say to Queen Sappodilla, for on that evening he intended openly to ask her hand. But, at a word from Splug, all the needles and pins were alive, and the needles, when they had all threaded themselves quietly, were slipping out of the box to busy themselves with his lordship. One stitched the back of his fine hat to the back of his coat-collar; another sewed up his pockets; another fastened the legs of his trousers to his boots. Whatever was hooked, tied, or buttoned of the clothes he wore the busy needles sewed up with the neatest of invisible stitches, but so strongly, that not even a knife could cut them through. That done, all that had been in the work-box, flying and gliding softly up and down, disposed itself in folds of my lord's clothes, so that he carried everything with him but the box itself when he went into her Majesty's presence.

But in what state did he appear before his sovereign? He had not been able to pull his gloves off, and the utmost that he had been able to do with his hat was to thrust it from the front of his head, so that the great peacock's tail streamed down over his back.

"My lord is ill!" said the Queen.

"Pardon me, great Sappodilla, that I do not come with naked hands into your presence. I have stained my fingers to-day with so much ink in your service that I dare not have them seen."

"But your hat, my lord——"

"Is a part of my coat; a new fashion. I hope you admire it. Ow? ow! whew!" My lord danced briskly, lifting up, as fast and as high as he could, first one leg and then the other. The Queen, who did not know that her favourite's legs were then being attacked by five large needles—two darners and three tailor's betweens—smiled, and said, "A new fashion in deportment also, I perceive."

"Emotion, august mistress! Emotion, caused by your graciousness." Then he clapped both his hands upon his back, and cried one long "Ow!" louder than before. Queen Sappodilla really thought that love for her had turned his lordship's brain, so, as she meant soon to make him happy, she at once asked him to take her in to dinner. Feeling for needles as he went, but finding none, because they nimbly slipped from fold to fold as he pursued them, my Lord Hemp led her Majesty to dinner. He dined alone with the Queen that day, and was expected, after the cheese, to prefer his suit. But when he sat down to table, he jumped up again with a wild cry, flinging his arms out, and knocking down a massive footman who stood near. "Poor man! he evidently suffers much on my account," said to herself Sappodilla.

But the needles and pins suffered my lord to sit down and rest until his soup was placed before him. Then, as he bent over it, the scissors buried themselves in his periwig, and snipped lock after lock of hair into his soup-plate. The Queen had her eyes on her own soup and did not observe this, but when her plate was empty, my lord still was playing with his spoon. Something was the matter, he felt, but no sign of his distraction must appear. Everything must go smoothly to-night. He would like to go home at once, take off his periwig, and search himself for pins; but if he did, he never could hope to be King of Gossamer. So he made up his mind, and with audible gulps—which the Queen flattered herself were hysterical—swallowed the soup with all the hair in it. It was not much easier to eat a piece of fish, through which a whole skein of cotton had found opportunity to entangle itself. As the skein was undivided, and would not be pulled away, it was necessary (in order to escape observation) that my lord should eat his bit of fish in one lump, when her Majesty happened to look another way. The effort to do this was boldly made, but it was unsuccessful. My lord managed to get all his bit of fish into his mouth at once, but then the threads hindered the swallowing. He turned black in the face, and three doctors had been sent for before he got it down. Nevertheless, on such a momentous occasion, he did not choose to be invalided. Happen what might, he must fight through his dinner, and secure the prize of a Queen's promise to be his wife before he slept that night. The next dish served was pickled pork and parsnips. He was not well, certainly, but surely he could eat a bit of that. And as the Queen condoled with him, and he talked courteously to her, with a bit of parsnip on the end of his fork, the lump of wax out of the work-box saw his opportunity, seized the position on the fork, went into my lord's mouth, and when my lord's teeth closed on him, never did wax hold so tight. Lord Hemp could not open his mouth any more that evening to swallow or to speak, because he could not draw his teeth out of the wax, and the Queen took him for a maniac with a piece of parsnip in his mouth. He was obliged to quit the half-finished dinner and forego the golden opportunity, that never came again; for, on the day following, Sappodilla heard what changed her mind. Lord Hemp was taken home in his great coach. The widow's work-box was still on the seat; he opened it and found it empty, though still heavy, for it was made of stout wood. When he dropped the lid, the box itself started up and flew at his face, so that when he got home his eyes were black and his nose was swollen with the thrashing it had given him.

Lord Hemp having reached home, was taken to bed. The seal of wax then dropped out of his mouth, and he began storming frightfully. That was because he was sewn up so firmly in his satin clothes that all his ten valets could not pull them off. The seams refusing to be ripped, he had to be peeled out of his white and blue satin with a knife, in such a way that the whole suit was destroyed. Then all the pins and needles went to bed with him, and the scissors sat up all night to cut his bed-clothes into strips.

It is impossible in less than a day to tell all that Lord Hemp suffered from the enemies that the Rogue Fairy had raised up against him. But we may be sorry that he was of a temper to grow worse instead of wiser for his griefs. He felt that he was punished by some Fairy for his cruelty in carrying away what was the slender prop of the poor widow's house. But he said, "I will not be bullied, even by a Fairy. If I do not have my rent next week, let her look out! I go myself, and I will bring away the silver tassels."

About these silver tassels the Rogue Splug was worrying his brains. "I am sure," he said to himself, "I ought to remember something about them. Teasel worked on them, I know. If I could see Teasel! If. But then there's that Parrot. Well, well, I will wait another week; and though I am a Rogue and Lord Hemp is another, this woman and girl are not to starve. I will go and scratch in their garden."

"Mother," said Silver Tassels, when Neroli woke from the sleep into which she had wept and prayed herself, after losing all her means of livelihood, "there is a date-tree in our garden—within the hedge! And it is full of fruit, too!"

The mother saw that this was true, and feared lest some false friend, perhaps even the old soldier, had brought in the night one of the Lord Hemp's trees into her garden. But no; the tree had brighter leaves, and larger fruit of a more golden colour than any of those in the date-grove behind the house. The child ran gaily out and filled her apron. Dates! These were too delicious to be dates.

Yet they had stones, as my Lord Hemp discovered, for he came, harder than ever, when another week was over, and because there was no money little Silver Tassels meekly put her girdle in his hand. As the great lord went away with it the tree caught his attention. He looked up, and instantly every date spat down into his face a stone as hard as his own heart. "I should like," said his lordship, as he got into his coach, "I should like to get rid of this piece of property."

But Splug, when the Lord Hemp was gone, and had carried away with him the silver girdle, thought to himself, "I will risk that Parrot! It was all very well for an innocent child to have the tassels, but now—I am off."

Flying half round the world to escape being again waylaid and engaged in conversation for the rest of his life, Splug travelled in half a day to the Court of the Cockatoos, and stood before Teasel as she was combing out the Queen Cockatoo's crest.

"What, Splug!" she cried, "and with a thimble on your head!"

"Never mind that. Answer me quickly. Did you not work once at a girdle with two silver tassels?"

The Queen Cockatoo gave a wild scream that brought King Cockatoo and half his army to her rescue. He was holding a review.

"The Silver Tassels, my own dear Splug," Teasel whispered; "have you found them? I can leave the Cockatoo to-morrow if you have."

"I know where they are," Splug answered. "But before I tell you, tell me what they are."

"They are the two ends of the power of the Cockatoos. These birds were a grand people while that Fairy girdle was worn by their Queen, for it kept off a race of magicians that became their enemies. It was lost ages ago, and then the magicians had power to change their enemies to birds. My friend the Queen Cockatoo has lost three of her sons who have gone out into the world to seek the girdle, and I came to comfort my dear friend, perhaps to help her. Now, Splug, where is it?"

"In evil hands," said the Rogue, "from which the Cockatoos themselves must go and take it. I will be their guide; but save me, somebody, from being clutched on the way by that Parrot, who has already once had me by the button for a six months' talk."

"Lead on!" said the King Cockatoo. "My armies follow." Scaring the clouds with their wild war-scream, a flight of myriads of cockatoos swept over the realm of Gossamer, eclipsed the sun over the city of Feathergrass, and stormed the palace of Lord Hemp. Cockatoos broke all his windows, cockatoos flew screeching in masses through his halls and chambers, screeching cockatoos seized him by the hair, arms, body, and legs with a thousand claws and beaks, while their King found the girdle with the silver tassels, and straightway flew with it homeward.

"What shall we do with the prisoner?" screeched all the cockatoos. The King being gone, Splug took on himself to answer. "Carry him to the Parrot. Let the Parrot claw him by the button. Let the Parrot talk to him till he can talk no more!" So it was done, and the Parrot, who can talk for ever, still has my Lord Hemp by the button somewhere in space, and is still talking to him about things that he cannot understand; because for the last thousand years my lord's head has been spinning round and round, and he knows only that the Parrot's claw is fastened on his coat, and that the Parrot's beak wags up and down, pouring out endless monotony of sounds, from which there is no hope of his escaping.

But the Queen Cockatoo, who had been following the army, was met very near Feathergrass by her victorious lord, who had the girdle in his grasp. She put it on, and instantly she and the King, with all their host, came to the ground in their true shapes. He was the most splendid of

Emperors and she of Empresses, heading a Court and army of lords, ladies, and soldiers, so gorgeously dressed that Queen Sappodilla, to whom they went to pay their respects, saw the glory of her magnificently decorated courtiers pale before that of the rich strangers in scarlet, gold, and azure blue. The surface of the earth round about Neroli's cottage, when the host of the cockatoos gathered about her, blazed with more than the glory of the richest sunset in the sky. There was a tapping at the door, and the child lifted the latch to a beautiful boy wearing a silver crown. He stepped in, and was followed by a shining Emperor and Empress, very fine to see, and handsome people, though they had hooked noses, and looked yellower than usual round the eyes. The Empress wore the girdle with the silver tassels, which has since that day once more been lost, so that in our time the cockatoos are birds again.

"Good Mother Neroli," said the beautiful youth—and this was Splug himself, for Teasel's sake no longer a rogue. Slipping from behind the Empress in scarlet, yellow, and azure-blue, the Fairy Teasel put her little arm round the waist of her friend Splug, as he took from his head the silver crown, and said, "Dear Mother Neroli, I have worn your silver thimble on my head till it has grown into a silver crown. Never ask now how I came by it. Wear it!" It was on her head before she could answer, and in the same moment she was robed in pure silver from top to toe.

"Ah, beautiful Mother!" then cried little Silver Tassels.

"Not more beautiful than in her old worn clothes, my child! Never more beautiful than when she gave that thimble to the rogue who tempted her."

"Ah, Mother, always beautiful!" said the child, sobbing happily upon her breast.

"For your silver tassels, little maid, you shall have all that can be given by the Emperor and Empress of the Cockatoos. Teasel here and I give nothing, you are richer far than we. So, darling, we are beggars to you for a wee bit of your heart. Be our own sister, and let us live with you in this house with our good Mother Neroli—in this house that can never again want bread for those in it, and for the poor who shall come to its door, while there is power in the throne of Oberon, and while there remains the nation of the Cockatoos."

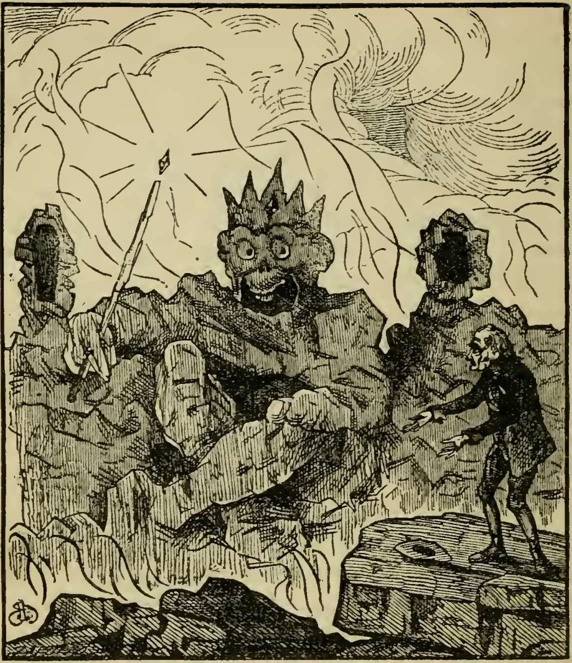
A Christmas Voice.

Acts we can read, but actors are impelled
By motives ill-revealed to mortal sight;
Foul deeds must be in foul abhorrence held,
Man may do foully from a sense of right.

Teach me, O Lord, for ever to pursue
The path which conscience may to me proclaim;
And while I labour to maintain the True,
No right in censure feel; no truth in blame.

Whether a sunbeam, or a single mote
Disturb the clearness of our upward gaze;
Enough, we gaze. Enough, our hearts devote
To Thee all service, gratitude, and praise.

Enough, we knock; Thy gates are open wide.
Enough, we ask; Thy blessings are bestowed.
Enough, we come; to none shall be denied
The living waters which for all have flowed.



THE KING OF THE HEARTH.

This tale was told by a miner at a tap-room fire. "It was in the year One thousand, eight, four, four; by token it was the same year in which the block fell upon Mr. Timothy's leg; I was taking a short turn among the coke ovens to get an appetite for my Christmas dinner. You are aware, gentlemen, that hereabouts there is a great number of deserted pits. The entrances to these are mostly covered with a board or two. There aren't many stiles in our pit-country, so we are drove to using these for firewood. The old pit mouths being left uncovered, and sometimes hidden in brushwood; it is a very common thing for sheep to tumble in, and if gentlemen go shooting hereabouts, they may chance to return home without a dog.

"I was thinking a good deal, and not minding where I walked, till, in the middle of my reflections—my natural Christmas thoughts—I felt a bump on the back; likewise an odd freedom about my legs, followed up with a crash against the hinder part of my head, and I was at the bottom of a pit in no time. I was not killed, as you see, but, of course, I was much stunned, and lay for a long time, I suppose. When I opened my eyes, there was nothing to be seen more than a faint glimmer from the daylight far above, and a great many dancing stars, which seemed like a swarm of gnats, ready to settle on my body. I was thinking how I should find rescue, when an odd matter got my attention. I was, unless my ears deceived me, not alone; for I heard, as distinctly as I now hear Mr. Drum's leg upon the fender, I heard a loud voice. It came from a distant gallery. 'Who did you say?' asked the voice in a hoarse tone; a softer voice replied, 'Phil Spruce, I think.' 'Very well,' answered the big sound; 'I'll come to him directly.'

"Here was a state of things. A gentleman lived here, and knew of my intrusion. Moreover, I myself was known. Was the acquaintance mutual? Well, gentlemen, that question was soon to be settled, for presently I heard a rustling and a crackling noise, like the approach of a lady in a very stiff silk dress. But that gruff voice!—I trembled. As the sound came nearer, a light gleamed over the dark, dirty walls, and glittered in the puddle upon which I was reposing. 'He or she has brought a candle: that is wise.' So I looked round. Mother of Miracles! He, she, or IT. What do you think approached? A mass of cinder, glowing hot, shaped into head, body, arms, and legs; black coal on the crown of its head, red glow on the cheeks, and all the rest white hot, with here and there a little eruption of black bubbles, spirting out lighted gas. It was the shape of a huge man, who walked up, with a most friendly expression in his face, evidently intending to give me a warm reception.

"And so he did, as I will tell you presently. It needed no aid from his natural qualities to throw me into a great and sudden heat; his supernatural appearance was enough for that. Then I was seized with a great fear lest, in his friendliness, he should expect me to shake hands. That was as if I should have thrust my fingers into this tap-room grate. Well, ma'am (your good health, Mrs. Pittis), the strange thing came up to me quite pleasant, with a beaming face, and said, in something of a voice like a hoarse blast-pipe, 'Glad to see you, Mr. Spruce. How did you come here?' 'Oh, sir,' said I, not liking to be behindhand in civility, 'I only just dropped in.' 'Cold up above, Mr. Spruce. Will you walk in and take a little something warm?' A little something warm! 'What's that?' thought I. 'Oh yes,' I said, 'with all my heart, sir.' 'Come along, then; you seem stiff in the bones, Mr Spruce, allow me to help you up.' 'Oh Lord!' I cried, forgetting my manners. 'No, thank you, sir. Spruce is my name, and spruce my nature. I can get up quite nimble.' And so I did, with a leap; although it made my joints ache, I can tell you. The Thing bowed, and seemed to be quite glowing double with delight to see me. 'Take a little something warm,' I thought again. 'Oh, but I won't, though! However, I must not seem eager to get away just yet: the beast seems to think I came down on purpose to see him.' 'After you, sir!' said I, bowing, and pulling my forelock; 'if you will be so good as to lead, I'll follow.' 'This way, then, Philip.'

"So we went along a gallery, and came to a vault which was lighted by the bodies of a great number of imps, all made of brisk live coal, like my conductor. 'I dare say you find the room close,' said the king—for I found afterwards he was a real king, though he was so familiar; 'what will you take to drink?' I calculated there was nothing weaker than vitriol in his cellar, so I begged to be excused. 'It is not my habit, sir, to drink early mornings; and indeed I must not let my wife wait dinner. We will have a little gossip, if you please, and then you will let one of your servants light me out, perhaps. I merely dropped in, as you are aware, my dear sir.' 'Quite aware of that, my dear Phil. And very glad I am to get your company. Of course you are anxious to be up above in good time; and if you can stop here an hour, I shall be happy to accompany you.' 'Indeed,' thought I to myself; 'Polly will stare.' 'Most happy,' I replied. 'I fear you will take harm from that nasty puddle at my door,' observed the king. 'Wouldn't you wish to lie down, and rest a bit, before we start out together.' I thought that a safe way of getting through the time. 'You are very good,' said I. 'Get a bed ready, Coffin and Purse!' Two bright little imps darted away, and the Thing, turning round to me with a sulphurous yawn, said, 'I don't mind, Phil, if I lie down with you.' 'Surely he's roasting me,' I thought.

"True as sorrow, Mr. Timothy, Coffin and Purse came back in no time to say the bed was ready; and I followed the king with as good courage as a Smithfield martyr. But I did not—I did *not* expect what followed. We went into a small vault, of which half the floor was covered by a blazing fire: all the coals had been raked level, and that was Coffin and Purse's bed-making. 'Well, I'll get in at once,' said the king; 'you see we've a nice light mattress.' 'Light, sir! why it's in vivid blazes. You don't suppose I can lie down on that.' 'Why not, Phil? you see

I do. Here I am snug and comfortable.' 'Yes, my dear sir, but you forget the difference there is between us?' 'And yes again, Mr. Spruce; but please to remember this is Christmas Day—a day on which all differences should be ended.'

"'And now,' said the monster, sitting up suddenly upon a corner of the bed, 'and now, Phil, I will urge you to nothing. You are a reasoning man, and count for a philosopher. Let's argue a bit, Mr. Spruce.' 'I'm favourable to free discussion,' I replied; 'but I decide on principles of common sense.' 'Let common sense decide,' replied the king, crossing his knees, and looking conversational. 'The point at issue is, whether with your views it would be better for you to remain a man or to become a cinder. What were your thoughts this morning, Philip Spruce?' 'This morning I was thinking about human nature, sir.' 'And how did you decide upon it, Philip?' 'Humbly asking pardon, sir, and meaning no offence, may I inquire whether in present company it is permitted to speak disrespectfully of the Devil?'"

"I wouldn't have said that, Phil, to a man of his appearance."

"Lord bless you, Mr. Timothy, he looked so mild disposed, and 'No offence,' he says; 'speak out without reserve.' 'Then, sir,' said I, 'this is what I think of human nature. I believe that it was full of every sort of goodness, and that men were naturally well disposed to one another, till the Devil got that great idea of his. Men are born to worship their Creator, and to supply the wants of their neighbours; but then comes in the deceiving fiery monster, with a pocketful of money, and says, quite disinterested, "Gentlemen and ladies, it's of no use asking you to venerate me; you don't do it, and you oughtn't to; but the most convenient and proper thing is for every individual to worship only just his self. You see the result of this," says the old sinner; "by paying sacrifice to your own images, you just change things from the right-hand pocket to the left; or if you go abroad, as you must do, in search of offerings, all the fish comes to your own net, and all the fat into your own belly. You smoke your own incense, and if you chance to be remiss in your devotions, you may make peace and atonement any way you please. Then," says the great brimstone beast—I beg your pardon, sir, excuse my liberty of speech—"if anybody remark you are my servants, you can laugh, and tell them you are no such fools. As for any formulary of religion, follow in that the fashion of your country——"'

"The cinder gentleman, Mrs. Pittis, my dear, rolled about in the fire, quite at his ease, and said, 'Very good, Phil. And what else have you to say of human nature?' by which you will see that he had discrimination enough to perceive the value of my observations. 'The result is, sir,' I says to him then, 'that the whole human race is a dancing and a trumpeting in corners, every man singing hymns in honour of his self. And the old enemy capers up and down the country and the town, rejoicing at the outcry which he hears from every lip in his honour. A friend is rarer than a phœnix; for no man can serve two images, and each sticks firmly by his own.'

"'Have you no charity yourself, this Christmas, Mr. Spruce?' inquired the king, after he had called to his two imps that they should put fresh coal on the bed, and rake it up. 'When I was a young man, sir,' said I, 'no one could have started in the world with a stronger faith in human goodness. But I've seen my error. All the ways of human nature are humbug, sir; as for my fellow-creatures, I've been very much deceived in 'em. That's all I know in answer to your question.'

"'I understand you, Phil,' the king said, lounging back upon the bed, and kindling the new coals into a blaze around him by the mere contact of his body. 'You are a philosopher out at elbows, and therefore a little out of temper with the world. You would like best to make your observations upon human nature without being jostled. You'd rather see the play from a snug little box, than be an actor in it, kicked about and worried.' 'Ah, sir,' said I, 'and where is such a seat provided?' 'Philip, I can answer that question,' said the king; 'and what is more, I can give you free admission to a snug private box.' 'How so, sir?' said I, quite eagerly. 'The coal-box, Phil,' replied the king. 'I'm puzzled, sir,' said I. 'In what way is my condition to be improved by the act of sitting in a coal-box?' 'That, my dear Phil, I will make as clear to you as a fire on a frosty night. Know, then, that I am King among the Coals.' I bowed, and was upon the point of kissing his extended hand, but drew back my nose suddenly. 'The cinder which I now have on I wear—because it is large and easy—in the manner of a dressing-gown, when here at home. I am, however, a spirit, and ruler over many other spirits similarly formed. Now, Phil, the business and amusement of myself and subjects is to transfer ourselves at will into the tenancy of any coal we please. The scuttles of the whole kingdom are our meeting-houses. Every coal cast upon the fire, Phil, is by our means animated with a living spirit. It is our amusement, then, to have a merry sport among ourselves; and it is our privilege to watch the scenes enacted round the hearths which we enliven. When the cinder becomes cold, the spirit is again set free, and flies whither it pleases, to a new abode.'"

"Isn't that the doctrine of metamicosis?" asked a boy, who was a national scholar, tapping the ashes from his pipe-bowl.

"It's a thing I never heerd on," said the gamekeeper. Mr. Spruce went on—

"'Did you never,' continued his majesty, 'when gazing into the fire, see a grotesque face glow before you? That face, Phil, has been mine. You have then seen the King among the Coals. If you become a cinder, Mr. Spruce, you may consider yourself made a judge.'

"'Well, sir,' says I, 'your reverence, it's firstly requisite to judge whether I will or won't sit down upon the fire. It's my opinion, I won't. I'd like a little more discussion.' 'Talk away, Phil,' said the king. 'Well, sir,' says I, 'since you're always a-looking—leastways in winter—through the bars of grates, it's possible you've seen a bit yourself of human nature. Don't it fidget you?' 'Why, Phil,' says he, a-stretching out his arms for a great yawn so suddenly as very nigh to set my coat on fire with his red fingers, 'I have been tolerably patient, haven't I?' 'If it's sarcasm you mean,' says I, a little nettled, 'I must say it's a figure of speech I don't approve of.'

"'I beg your pardon, sir,' he says, 'and here's an answer to your question. It's my opinion, Mr. Spruce, that as a cinder you will be agreeably surprised. I do see people sitting around me, now and then, whom I can't altogether get my coals to blaze for cheerfully. They sit and talk disparagement about all manner of folks their neighbours; they have a cupboard in their hearts for hoarding up the grievances they spend their lives in searching for; they hate the world, and could cut scandal out of mill-stones, but if one hints that they are erring, they are up in arms and don't approve of sarcasm.' 'Sir,' said I, 'you are personal.' 'By no means, Mr. Spruce; you, and a number like you, are good people in the main, and deeply to be pitied for your foolish blunder. You're a philosopher, Phil,' he says, 'and did you never hear that your "I" is the only thing certainly existent, and that the world without may be a mere shadow or mere part of you, or if external, of no certain form or tint, having the colour of the medium through which you view it—your own nature.' Here I saw occasion for a joke. 'Sir,' I says, 'if my own "I" is the only thing certainly existing, then the external world is all my eye, which proves what I propounded.' His flames went dead all of a sudden, and he looked black from top to toe. 'I am sure I beg your pardon, sir,' says I; 'excuse my liberty.'

"He took no verbal notice of what I had said, but gave a tremendous shiver, and his flames began to play again. 'I'm of a warm and cheerful turn of mind,' says he, 'and I must say, that whenever I look out upon the men and women in the world, I see them warm and cheerful.' 'That's nothing wonderful,' said I; 'it's just because you see them sitting round your blaze.' 'Well,' says he, 'Mr. Spruce, I'm very glad you own so much; for my opinion is, that if you had shone out cheerfully when you were in the world, and warmed the folks that came within your influence—if you had put a little kindly glow into your countenance, you would have been surrounded as I generally am.' 'You're young,' says I, 'and you have had no experience; leastways, your experience has not been human. You get stirred when you're low, and people tend you for their own sakes—you ain't preyed upon by disappointments.'

"'Young!' said he; 'disappointments!' And to my horror, he stood bolt upright, to be impressive. 'Look you, Mr. Spruce, the youngest is the wisest; the child remembers throughout years a happy day, and can forget his tears as fast as they evaporate. He grows up, and his budding youth imagines love. Two or three fancies commonly precede his love. As each of these decays, he, in his inexperience, is eloquent about his blighted hopes, his dead first love, and so on. In the first blossom of his manhood, winds are keen to him; at his first plunge into the stream of active life he finds the water cold. Who shall condemn his shiver? But if he is to be a healthy man, he will strike out right soon, and glow with cheerful exercise in buffeting the stream. Youth, Mr. Spruce, may be allowed to call the water of the world too cold, but so long only as its plunge is recent. It is a libel on maturity and age to say that we live longer to love less. Preyed upon by disappointments——'

"'Yes,' says I, 'preyed upon.'

"'Say, rather, blessed with trial. Who'd care to swim in a cork jacket! Trouble is a privilege, believe me, friend, to those who know from whose hand and for what purpose it is sent. I do not mean the trouble people cut out for themselves by curdling all the milk of kindness in their neighbours. But when a man will be a man, will labour with truth, charity, and self-reliance—always frank and open in his dealings—always giving credit to his neighbours for their good deeds, and humbly abstaining from a judgment of what looks like evil in their conduct—when he knows, under God, no helper but his own brave heart and his own untiring hand—there is no disappointment in repulse. He learns the lesson Heaven teaches him, his Faith and Hope and Charity by constant active effort become strong—gloriously strong—just as the blacksmith's right arm becomes mighty by the constant wielding of his hammer. Disappointment—let the coward pluck up courage—disappointment is a sheet-and-pumpkin phantom to the bold. Let him who has battled side by side with Trouble say whether it was not an angel sent to be his help. Find a true-hearted man whose energies have brought him safe through years of difficulty; ask him whether he found the crowd to be base-natured through which he was called upon to force his way? Believe me, he will tell you, No.' Having said this, his majesty broke out into a blaze, and lay down in his bed again. 'Well,' he said, 'Philip, will you come to bed with me?'

"'Why, sir,' said I, 'to say the best of it, you're under a misconception; but if it's in the nature of a coal to take such cheerful views of things as you appear to do, I'd rather be a coal than what I am. It's cold work living in the flesh, such as I find it; you seem jolly as a hot cinder, and for the matter of that, what am I now but dust and ashes? Coke is preferable.'

"'Coffin and Purse, you're wanted,' cried the king. And indeed, Mrs. Pittis, and indeed, gentlemen, I must turn aside one minute to remark the singularity of this king's body-guard, Coffin and Purse. 'Cash and Mortality,' said the king to me, 'make up, according to your theory, the aim and end of man. So with a couple of cinders you can twit him with his degradation. Sometimes Coffin, sometimes Purse, leaps out into his lap when he is cogitating.' 'Yes,' said I, 'that will be extremely humorous. But, so please your majesty, I still have one objection to joining your honourable body.' 'What is that, Phil?' 'I suppose if I sit down in them there flames they'll burn me.' 'To be sure,' said the king, kicking up his heels, and scraping a furnace load of live coals over his body, just as you might pull up the blanket when you're in bed to-night, Mrs. Pittis. 'Well, your highness,' said I, 'how about the pain?' 'Pah!' says the king, 'where's your philosophy? Did you never see a fly jump into a lamp-flame?' 'Yes, sure,' I answered. 'And what happened then? A moment's crackle, and an end of it. You've no time to feel pain.' 'Well, then,' said I, 'if your majesty will make a hole for me as near the middle as is convenient to yourself, I will jump into the bed straightway.' The king made a great spatter among the coals, and in I jumped. You know, ma'am, that a great part of our bodies is composed of water."

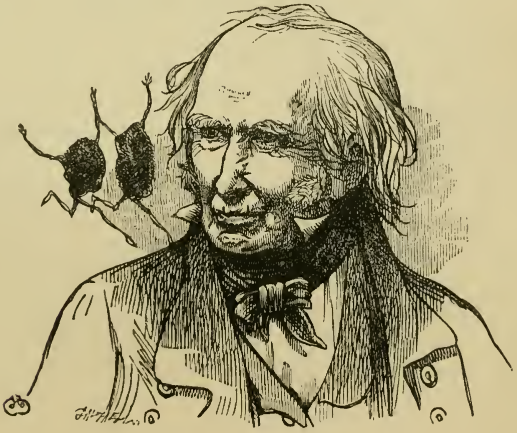
"I don't know that of any gentleman in this room," replied the landlady. "But I do believe that you are two parts built out of strong beer."

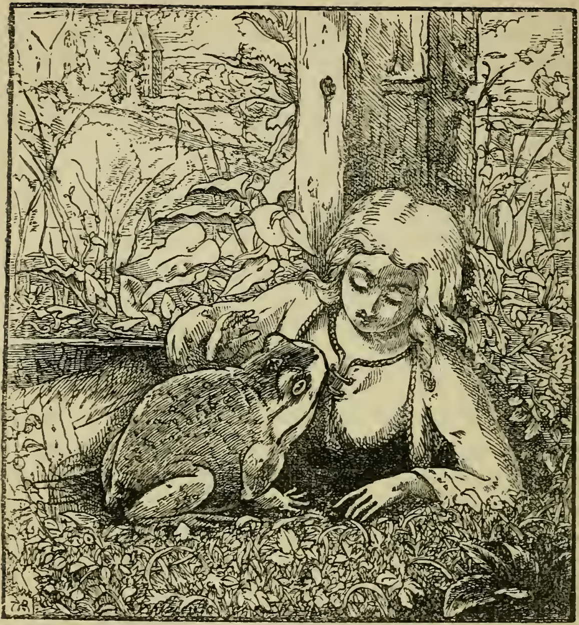
"There was a burst—a flash, gentlemen; the liquid part of me went off in instantaneous steam. I cried out with a sharp burn in my foot. The pot was boiling over furiously that contained our bit of dinner; and as I sat close in to the fire, I got considerably scalded. How I got back in the steam to my own fireside, I never rightly comprehended. Fill the can now, Mrs. Pittis."

"Yes," said the landlady; "but let me tell you, Mr.

Spruce, that King of the Hearth's a gentleman, and if you really had gone with the coals and got acquainted with firesides, it would have done you a great deal of good. You'd have owned then that there is a mighty deal more love than hatred in the world. You'd have heard round almost any hearth you chose to play eavesdropper to, household words anything but hard or bitter. Some people do not pay their scores with me, but on the whole I live. Some of our human natures may run termagant; but on the whole we men and women love. Among the worst are those who won't bear quietly their share of work, who can't learn self-reliance, but run to and fro squealing for help, and talking sentiment against their neighbours who won't carry their burdens for them. The more such folks are helped, the more they are helpless; the more they are pitied, the more they will make themselves pitiable. 'There's no smell to these roses,' quoth the skunk. It's all very well for a musty, discontented old bachelor to say there's no love in the world, but it's a falsehood. I know better."

"My pipe's out," said the boy. "Be smart there with the 'baccy."





THE TOAD'S WIFE.

Rospo was an ambitious nobleman, who had a jewel of a wife. What poets feign that their loves have, she really had. Her eyes were diamonds, her teeth were pearls, her hair was of the purest gold. She was a wife much valued by her husband.

"Ah!" said he, one morning, when he observed her biting bread at breakfast. "What teeth, my treasure! A gift of only one such pearl would make the chief Sultana, who has rule over the great Sultan himself, my servant. Ah, me! ah, me! my fortune at Court could be made with one of those large double teeth that your cheek hides. And you bite bread with them."

"I would give more than a tooth to serve you," said the good wife; and she really caused her largest double tooth to be drawn for him. It was a pearl for any queen.

"You said you would give more than a tooth to serve me," Rospo whispered to his wife, a fortnight afterwards, when they walked in the woods together. "The Queen longs for another pearl like that I gave her, because then she might have a pair of ear-drops beautiful enough to make the houris die of envy." And he had the other tooth.

A week afterwards Rospo was very sad. The mighty Vizier to the Sultan of the Dawn was dying, he explained. Another man competed with himself in bribes to become the old Vizier's successor. He had spent all in vain, and was a ruined man, unless one other bag of gold could be obtained to give weight to his claim.

"Be comforted," said the kind wife. "Look at this idle wealth of hair, on a head that is never seen by the world uncovered. Take it and win your prize." Accordingly she had her head shaved to the scalp, and gave him all her golden hair, for which he returned vows of everlasting love.

"Vexatious accident!" cried Rospo, rushing suddenly into his wife's chamber, three days afterwards. "The Sultan of the Dawn has changed his favourite. Another of his wives now rules him. Yesterday it was all Zarem, now it is all Zeram; and Zeram is furious against me, because of the two great pearls given by me to her rival."

"Take my other grinders," said the wife.

"Useless, alas! useless!" said the husband. "All the pearls in your mouth, furious as she is, will barely suffice to turn her anger into friendship."

"At least," said the kind lady, "you may take them all and try."

"Glorious success, my precious one," said Rospo to his wife next day. "Zeram is mad with delight at the pearl bracelet I have given her. The Vizier cannot live another hour. The Sultan is now on his way to consult with him for the last time, and hear his last wishes. That miserly wretch, even in his last hour, is greedy for a bribe. My rival has just left his door. I know that I have but to ask for one of those great diamond eyes of yours, and have it in time to make sure of the creature's good word against whatever gift another can have offered him." So Rospo rushed away again, with one of his wife's eyes in his hand, and in the evening went back with exultation, crying out, "Better and better! It needs only the other diamond to make me Vizier. The old man is dead, and spoke for me. But when the Sultan saw upon the coverlet the diamond I had just given, he said that no man should be the Vizier but he who would present his ruler with another diamond as glorious as that."

"But," said the wife, "I am now bald, toothless, and one-eyed. Will you bear with me and guide me when I am left altogether blind?"

"An Eastern wife," said Rospo, angrily, "is never seen of men, and has nothing to see except her husband. You know well what I am like. Think that after all I have done, and all the trouble I have had, and wealth I have risked, without that other diamond I shall be ruined."

So the good wife was left sitting in darkness, and her husband, become Vizier to the Sultan of the Dawn, returned to her no more. Why should he? How could she help him when she could not help herself?

But Oberon and Titania were then travelling across the country of the Dawn. So they went one of them to Rospo, and the other one to his deserted wife.

The Sultan did not see the King of the Fairies, but it was odd that he did not see any more his own Vizier, who had been flattering him but a minute ago. And there was a large toad hopping to the door. It seemed to have come from underneath the throne.

Oberon, leading the Toad by a magic string, met on his way Titania, who advanced towards him lovingly, with her arm on the neck of the most radiant of fairies. It was a Fairy with eyes of the starlight, hair of plaited sunbeams, and teeth through which she could lisp a magic language.

"I take this good wife for my friend," Titania said.

"And I have brought that fellow Rospo to the dust," said Oberon. "See, here he is, and for his punishment he bears a jewel in his head. The Sultan has not missed it from its casket yet, and when he does he will not know that the Toad's head is its casket now. The Toad's head shall be heavy with it; he shall never be without a headache until Oberon is dead. Come with us, beautiful new Fairy."

"Nay," said the Fairy wife. "Since the Toad is my husband, I shall make my couch with him and cherish him." She did so; and because of her there is not a more humbled and harmless, or a more home-keeping creature upon earth than the Toad, who was once so eager to go out and be a Vizier. His headache is still constant; one has only to look at him and see that. Of the precious jewel in his head we have all heard. As for the Toad's Wife, in the homes of generous and patient women she has, in our own time, now and then been seen.

ROBIN AND RICHARD.

Robin and Richard went up a hill one night to look for witches, and as they came down again found, tied to a tree, an old black nag, who had cropped all the grass within his tether, and was straining his neck to get at another blade or two.

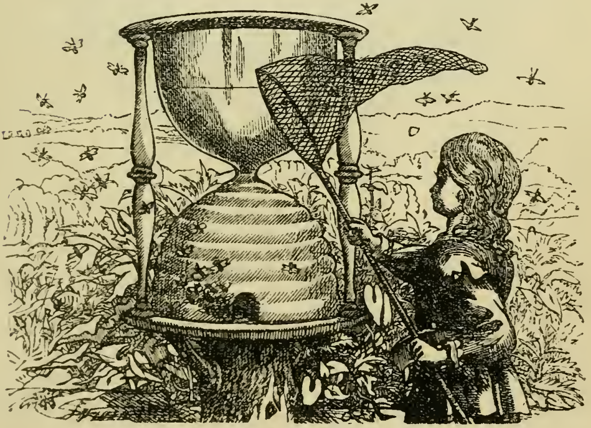
"Poor devil!" said Richard. "May your master get a bag and bottle that he cannot fill!"

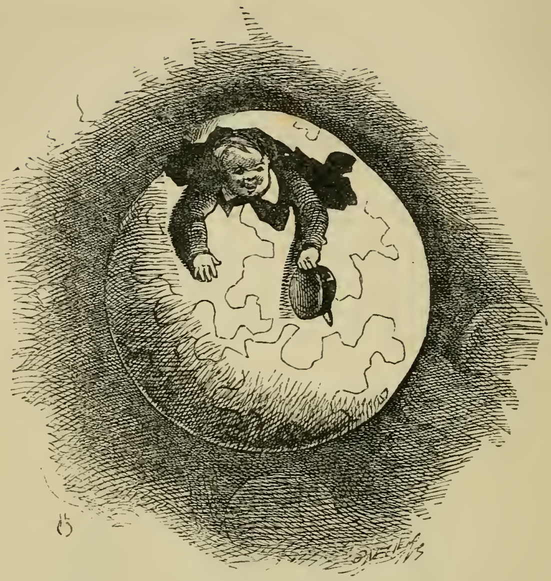
Robin said nothing, but threw large handfuls of grass within reach of the horse, who only said, "Ho! ho!" and turning the loose grass up with his nose, disclosed a leathern water-bottle and a meal-bag lying under it. "Master Richard," he said, "have what you wish yourself, for I am yours! But I am Master Robin's too, and he shall ride me."

Richard took what was offered him; Robin untied the nag; and as they went home they resolved to set out next morning on their travels. But they went to bed at dawn. So, as every nurse knows, they lay abed until the sun was very high, when Robin said to Richard:—

"You go before with your bottle and bag,
And I'll come after on my black nag."

Robin, when he came up to Richard, found him with a miller, of whom he had bought as much meal as would fill his bag. All the contents of the mill were poured into it, and still the bag was empty. Thereupon Richard said that the miller was still in his debt, and held his bottle until all the millstream had run into it, and had not filled it. But Robin, when the bread and water were all gone, as the debt still was unpaid, took up the miller himself on his nag, and trotted off with him. These brothers did much of this kind of business, married scolds, and had bad attorneys for their children.





A BOY'S ADVENTURES.

I HAD been reading "Albert Pugby, or a Boy's Adventures in the Wilds of Africa;" "The Steppes, or Peterkin in Asia;" "John Jones, or a Boy's Adventures in the Forests of America;" "The Australian Crusoe, or Little Billy in the Bush;" "Tom Frost, or a Baby's Residence upon the Top of Dhawalagiri;" &c. &c. &c. &c. &c. Bold boys and girls, goody boys and girls, solicitous mammas and priggish explanatory papas, whose heads I yearned to knock against the corner of the mantelpiece, sat like one mass of nightmare on my stomach, and disturbed my nap after a New Year's dinner. Of the Seven Champions of Christendom, it is great wonder to me that the story has not been re-cast after the fashion of the time, which should present them as Master George, and Master Patrick, and five other little Masters, with a Master Arthur to play round games at his table, who should have a mamma to refer to upon all occasions, and a papa to tell him that "It has been supposed by some that St. Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, might have visited Britain, and I am sure it will be interesting to you, my dear Arthur, if I state the grounds upon which a supposition of this nature may be regarded as extremely probable." Arthur duly responding, "Oh, yes, do, papa!" Enough. My dinner was spoilt in my stomach, and I read indignantly "A Nightmare Tale for Boys," under the handkerchief which hides my face when I have dined. A streak of pantomime seems to have coloured it, for I had been taking our young people to sundry Christmas entertainments. Out of a square book, then, with a scarlet cover, upon which were golden pictures of strange monsters, I seemed in my dream to be reading something like what follows:—

Franklin Bruce was a bad boy. Everybody liked him, but his Aunt Grumbletub said he was a bad boy, and as he lived with her, and as she was his only known relation, she was likely to be well informed about him. Out of her house he was so good-tempered and brave that everybody loved him. Aunt Grumbletub had a turned-up nose—a very much turned-up nose—so much so, indeed, that it presented a front view of the nostrils. It was an aggravating nose, too; for the old lady's spectacles refused to rest on any part of it except the extreme point. Mrs. Grumbletub invariably placed them on the right part of her nose, and they as invariably slid down the curved slope until they were brought up by the little hillock at the end. There they condescended to repose in peace.

"Have you learnt your Latin verb, Franklin, and done your sum?" asked this lady of the rosy boy, whose fair hair and bronzed complexion bespoke his familiarity with out-door sports.

"The rule of three does puzzle me," replied the boy, with a smile, and in a tone that betrayed the presence of some foreign body in his mouth.

"Take that nasty thing out of your mouth, whatever it is," ejaculated Mrs. Grumbletub, her dark eyes flashing fire.

"Nay, aunt," responded the boy; "I did but suck my alley."

"Obey me, torment!" reiterated the aunt.

"You are my Mentor," replied the boy, "and I obey."

"Alley to Jericho!" exclaimed the infuriated woman, casting the devoted marble through the open window. "Oh that I could but send you after it!"

"I go," said the boy; and spitting on his slate, he wiped from it with his sleeve the unfinished rule-of-three sum, and without stopping to put on his cap, went out at his aunt's door with the design of travelling to Jericho.

As he walked rapidly down the village, Franklin observed a man with shaggy hair, two wooden legs, one eye, one arm, and an anchor tattooed on his cheek, who was waltzing with a monkey on the green before the village inn. Curiosity induced him to pause and observe this singular pair, and with the thoughtless generosity of youth he expressed his pleasure at the entertainment thus afforded him by putting into the man's hat, when the monkey brought it round among the bystanders, a new sixpence, which was all the money he had in the world.

"Good morrow, noble sir," said the sailor, for such apparently he was, when he had overtaken the boy in a green lane at a distance of some miles from the village of Dash, in which his aunt resided. "We seem to be travelling, your honour, in the same direction, and we shall have the moon presently to light us. You sail late out of port, my hearty. Whither bound?"

"Across the seas," answered the boy. "My aunt sends me to Jericho, and I intend to journey thither. You seem to be a sailor. Do you know anything about the place?"

"Know it, my hearty? Do I know a marlinspike? Many's the yarn I have heard in the bay of Jericho. Why, man, I bought this monkey from the natives there, and a fine bout of fisticuffs I had with a shark that was chasing it, when, by ill-luck, one day it fell over the maintop gunwale cross-tree booms into the sea."

"Indeed, sir!" said Franklin. "Would you mind telling me that story?"

"Better than tell it, I will. See here, my man; this white road's the water, there's poor Jocko in the water, you're the shark after him, this bank's the deck of the *Saucy Sally*, and them trees is Jericho Castle, close alongside of which we are moored. Now, I am up the bank, you see; on deck, you know. Sharks to starboard! Look out to larboard! Down with the lee scuppers! One, two, three! Down I come on you, Master Shark, and down you are——"

"Oh, but you hurt me, sir!"

"It's over in a minute. Down goes the shark, you see; and I not only turn him over, but I take him by the neck, and before I leave him, your honour—just permit me—I strip off his very skin."

When the sailor had begun to pull off Franklin's jacket, the boy saw his intention.

"Good!" he cried. "And did you skin the very toes of the shark?"

"Ha! that did I," said the man; and kneeling down before the boy, he proceeded to unlace his new Balmoral boots, but was delayed, as Franklin knew that he would be, by the hard knot into which one of the laces had been tied. In the meantime young Bruce, without discovering fear or suspicion, made a grotesque resistance, and rolled on the ground as if he were the shark still fighting for his prey. The boots were off.

"Now for the waistcoat," said the sailor.

"No," answered Franklin Bruce; "with your leave, now I shall put on my clothes again;" and snatching up his boots and his jacket, he retired some steps from the still kneeling plunderer, who jumped up to pursue, and at once fell flat upon his face; for Franklin had, during the mock struggle, contrived with his pocket-knife to cut two inches from one of the man's wooden legs, and seven inches from the other, as they lay on the ground behind him, when he knelt to work at the bootlaces.

"You have sixpence of mine," said the boy, "I give it you in payment for your hat;" so, putting the thief's nautical hat on his own head, and tying it by a string to his button-hole, Franklin resumed his journey.

The moon was just peeping over the trees as the boy marched onward, having left the villain and his monkey far behind, when suddenly he heard a rushing noise and a wild cry; and in the next instant an open post-chaise, dashing in round a corner, crossed the road, and was plunged by an infuriated horse towards the brink of an adjacent horrible abyss. The chaise contained a gentleman and lady, with their governess, their maid, and their six children. Franklin Bruce saw only the face of a lovely girl, who had blossomed through ten summers, as she stood up, crying wildly, "Wo, wo!" to the horses. Never before had he seen such woe as was depicted in her face; never before had a vision of such beauty crossed his path. At a glance he saw that the horses were those of the Bugle, in the neighbouring post-town, and that one of them was the vicious Bruiser, whom the ostler had so often suffered him to ride. The love of that horse for the merry boy had been the wonder of the inn-yard; and now, even in his hurry, at the sound of a cheery "Woa-ho" from Franklin, the horse turned as to a dear friend whom it would be rude to pass in the public road without a recognition. The first pause was enough; Franklin at once walked round the animal, soothing and patting him. The peril was averted; the horse's head was turned by its driver from the abyss, over the brink of which it almost hung. And when the chaise had been turned quietly back to the high-road, the gentleman said, "Receive, my boy, the blessing of a grateful father, and accept some token, however inadequate, of my approval of your conduct. Oblige me by resuming your seat, my dear child, Louisa Jane." The blue-eyed fairy who had first caught Franklin's attention, and who now leaned forward to speak with him, sat down in decorous silence at the wish of her papa; but when Franklin had received the fourpenny piece with which he was rewarded, after a vain search for sixpence among the elders in the chaise—for the father of the house unfortunately had by him no coin smaller than a shilling—Louisa Jane darted a kind and meaning glance at her preserver, as she dropped her little thimble over the chaise door.

The chaise rolled away, and with a new sentiment at his heart, Franklin resumed his journey. He slept that night under a haystack, and in the morning breakfasted upon a portion of the fourpence. Soon afterwards he went on board the *Arrow*, which was a fine large ship, and set sail for the islands of the Pacific Ocean.

He had been picked up by the first mate, who, being in want of a shipboy, told him that Jericho was an island in the midst of the Pacific Ocean, and that he should be quite sure to go there if he sailed with him. An English family was on board, but he saw none of the members of it for some days, as they remained behind the partition that had been made in the main cabin for their private accommodation. He was told that the passengers were a Mr. Robinson and his family, from Paternoster Row, who were going out to establish for themselves an Owhyhee Family Robinson. Being much ridiculed about the misfit of the sailor's hat which he had taken from the ruffian in the lane, and as it constantly was blown by the wind as far away from his head as the string would suffer it to go, so that he never actually wore it, Master Bruce resolved to gather it in with a piece of twine. Pulling aside the lining for that purpose, he found a pad of soft paper, such as often is placed under their linings by persons who have purchased hats that are too large for them. This he threw aside; but having ended his task, and tried on the amended hat, he found that the pad, with a little re-arrangement of its shape, would still improve the fit; and, therefore taking it up again, he began to unfold it. Then he found, to his surprise, that it consisted wholly of bank-notes, every note being for the same sum of one thousand pounds, and there were just a hundred of them. This was a discovery which gave him some uneasiness; for, being at sea, it was not in his power to give information to the police of the considerable amount of stolen property which he had thus recovered, neither did he feel that it was safe to confide in the rude seamen who surrounded him. Determining, therefore, to tell his story to the British Consul in the first port touched at by his vessel, Franklin replaced the notes in their original position, taking good care to see to the knots of the string that tied his valuable hat to his jacket. He had observed that the notes were all indorsed "I. Pilkins, Oct. 1, 18—;" that, he was sure, was clue enough to the discovery of their right owner.

This troublesome business being so far settled, it was with a rapture which I leave my reader to imagine that the young sailor, turning from his work, saw at the bulkheads a sylph-like form, the form of the fair-haired Louisa Jane, who was holding her doll's eyes over the water, in order that she might see the porpoises. The two children recognised each other, and were friends directly. While they were still in full chat, Louisa's shoulder was tapped by her father, Mr. Bosh Robinson, who had come up with the rest of the family, and whose approach the two young people had been too busy with each other to observe.

"I approve of this, my dear Louisa," said Mr. Robinson; "never, my dear child, be ashamed of a kind word spoken even to the vulgarest of little boys; we are all equal; this dirty person is your equal, my child. Your good mamma has learnt that there is no piano carried in our vessel; you must for a time, therefore, suspend your practising; but Miss Inkpen will be happy to speak French with you till dinner-time. Go to her, my dear."

"Dear papa!" said Louisa, "this is the little boy who stopped that horse for us."

"Indeed so! I recognise him now. Acquaint me with your name and business, boy?"

"Franklin Bruce; going to Jericho."

"Jericho, poor youth! Can it be that you are ignorant of the geography of the plain of the Jordan. My son Walter, who is eight years of age, and you are——"

"Twelve, sir."

"Twelve, sir—can possibly inform you. Walter, do you remember, and can you describe to this boy, the position of Jericho in the plain of the Jordan?"

"I remember it well, papa," replied Walter. "For the last thirty miles of the river's course, including the tract in the vicinity of the ancient Jericho, the plain has a more than usually barren and desolate aspect. Near Jericho (now represented by some ruins not far from the small village of Riha) the formation of the ground becomes less regular; the western mountains, in one or two places, jut out considerably into the Ghor; the cliffs less exactly mark the bounds of the lower plain; and the descent from the higher ground towards the bathing-place of the pilgrims (nearly abreast of Jericho) is marked by a number of rounded sand-hills. A large patch of green stunted trees and shrubs marks the site of what is supposed to be the ancient Jericho; and here and there are to be seen the remains of some considerable buildings, with fragments of an aqueduct at the foot of the hills, to the north-west of the modern village."

"Very good," said Mr. Robinson; "as the reward of merit, you may go down and ask Miss Inkpen for a sum in fractions."

Mr. Robinson was an elderly man, with white hair gathered into a top-knot over his forehead, and a white projecting beard; he wore large spectacles, stooped much, and walked with a stick. The cut of his clothes was peculiar; they were of bright colours, and he had a little cloak with a hood to it, which especially attracted Franklin's notice. As Walter went down with Louisa to Miss Inkpen, the baby, who was in the maid's arms, noticing a bright moon in the sky, began to crow and cry, "La lune! la lune!" for it had been taught a few words of the French language.

"What notice the child takes!" said Mrs. Robinson.

"It does, indeed," said papa, removing it from the nurse's arms, and placing it upon his lap. "You admire, baby," he said, "the brightness of the moon; but it is time that you should be made aware, my poppet, that the moon is intrinsically a dark body, without inherent light of its own. It depends upon sunshine for the light it gives; and the varying appearances, or phases, of the moon depend upon different proportions of the illuminated disc of the opaque ball being presented to sight from the earth at different times."

Never can I tell in detail to a confiding public all that I read in the nightmare book. A frightful storm arose, and Mr. Robinson discoursed on the phenomena of storms in the midst of a shipwreck. Franklin's hat was blown from its moorings at his button-hole, in a tremendous hurricane, and lost at sea. All hands were lost except the entire family of Mr. Robinson, with Franklin Bruce, and an old sailor, who were thrown on a wild, tropical island, inhabited by a strange race of savages, called the Ka Lowns.

This people painted its face white, tattooed over with large, angular spots of red, and streaked itself with red about the mouth. It wore loose parti-coloured linen garments, and was constantly at war with the tribe of the Ar Leekins in the mountains higher up, chiefly upon the subject of intermarriage with the Coo Lumbins, a race of half-naked women, also dwelling in that same island of Roottetoote. There were brilliant bowers, birds of gay plumage, sea and land monsters of hideous form inhabiting the island, upon the shore of which our adventurers planted themselves with only an old box to live in. They had scarcely fixed their camp when one of the natives rushed towards them, mouthing, and uttering the cry, "Erawearagain howchadoo," with which they always make their entrance into battle. Mr. Robinson taught much to the children, and the handiness of the young Franklin, who had been engaged as a page by Mrs. Robinson, won for him the goodwill of the household, or rather boxhold, and the admiration of Louisa.

But a cloud was upon that youth's soul, which all the wonderful productions of the island, daily explained to him so carefully, and all the wild adventures in the bushes, could not melt away. A chance mention by dear Mr. Robinson of the name of I. Pilkins, in connection with an allusion to his own former prosperity, and to the reverse which, by enforcing on him a prudent economy, had disqualified him from presenting, on a certain memorable occasion, more than fourpence to his deliverer, led to the disclosure that I. Pilkins had been agent for the sale of great estates in Boothia Felix, owned by Mr. Robinson, and that the money yielded by them, many hundreds of thousands of pounds in banknotes, forwarded October the first, eighteen hundred and —, had been robbed from the messenger, whose body was found in a well. And Franklin, having found and lost this treasure, carried about a secret; for he dared not risk the anger of the father of Louisa.

One day as he walked sadly in the woods skirting the sea-shore, a bird's nest, singular in form, attracted his attention. He climbed the stem, and saw, to his delight, the sailor's hat which had been blown to land by the same hurricane that drove them also upon the island, which had been caught in the trees, and in which a pair of parrots had since made their nest. It was found to contain notes for one hundred thousand pounds. Then he told his story.

"Delightful are this parrot's notes," said Mr. Robinson, moved for the first time and last time in his life to make an approach to a small pleasantry. Then patting Franklin on the head, he said, "Good boy, it is my duty surely to reward you hundred-fold. You gave for this hat sixpence, and although usurious interest is commonly to be regarded as unholy, I believe that I am justified in returning to you your money with interest, at the rate of one hundred per cent. Accept this shilling."

Louisa was now heir to immense wealth, and Franklin was but a poor page; but the two children got lost in the wood one day, and were seized by the Ar Leekins, a race of people tattooed in bright colours and at war with the Ka Lowns. These wild creatures carried the little boy and girl into a cave of diamonds, which was the palace and the property of their chief, who, seeing that Franklin had a corn on each of his little toes, knew him to be his son. This was indeed Franklin's long-lost papa, who had been cast on the same island many years before, was given up for dead in England, but in Roottetoote had accepted the tattoo of the Ar Leekins, and had by his agility become their chief. He would not leave his new home, where he was married to a lovely wife from among the Coo Lumbins, but he gave to his son one hundred thousand sacks of diamonds, which there is reason to suppose made him, in due time, an eligible husband for Louisa Jane, the eldest daughter of the great Bosh Robinson, Esquire.

NECK AND NECK.

A HORSE meeting a camel reared and snorted. "I cannot see how I offend you," said the camel. But the horse, without answering, ran to his friends.

"That fellow, the camel," he said, "cannot see how he offends me! Odious beast, that with a hump like that upon his back, carries his head so high!"

"The giraffe is worse," said a quick-eared old racer called Maestro. "Disgraced all over with black spots, he yet carries his head higher than any creature living."

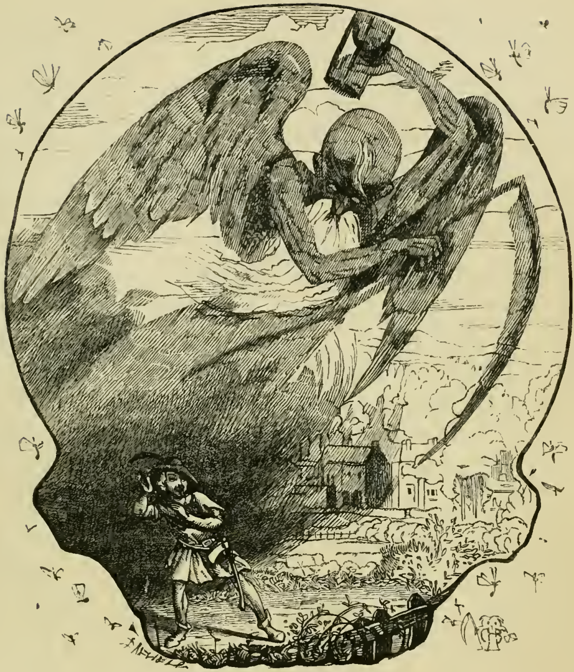
"Then," said a foal, "there is the pig, who eats dirt, and says that his grunt will scare an elephant."

"That," said the racer, "is false. But I certainly have carried a two-legged pig who thought as highly of himself. There are men also with frightful humps who hide them behind high necks like the camel; and the men who have the tallest necks are the most covered with spots."

"But, after all," neighed a good-tempered cart-horse, "the camel is as he was made."

"So is the spotted beast," neighed an old mare. "So is the hog," neighed another. "So is man," neighed the foal.

"In that pleasant chorus," said Maestro, "there was one false note, I think. Neigh it again, and let the foal keep silence."



THE BAG OF MINUTES.

CHAPTER I.

TIME ON HAND.

Once upon a time there was a youth, named Trigonel, who was a grief to his mother, because he had never in his life eaten hot meat. As an infant in arms, hot meat was not his food, and when he could use his legs he was abroad at work or at play, so busy or so idle, that he never came to dinner till his meat was cold.

Dame Peaflower, Trigonel's mother, was a proud and particular woman. It was her noon of glory to set a hot dish in the middle of her table at the very moment when the sun—that hot dish on which all the flowers feast—stood in the middle of the day. For the sun to stand still at noon would not have been more unnatural than for the potatoes in the pot of Mistress Peaflower to need another minute's boiling when the clock struck twelve. Keeping hot is overcooking. "Better," she said, "let meat be cold than overcooked." Papilion, her husband, was of the same mind; and little Vetch, her only daughter, being helpful to the mother in the house, and being indeed the person who peeled the potatoes, always was on the spot when she ought to be eating. But of her one son, Trigonel, it was the single fault that he was always behind time in coming to his dinner.

Yet this Trigonel was a brave, stalwart lad; able, in hour of need, to bear the whole weight of the house upon his shoulders. Father Papilion, who was a woodcutter, chopped his foot one day with a false stroke of the axe. He was then confined to his house for many weeks; not while he got well, but while his wound got worse and worse, until at last his life was nearly at an end. Trigonel worked with the strength of two men in the forest. In many hours of the night he was his father's watchful nurse. He found odd moments, too, in which he could make mirth and sing, with a voice cracking into manly roughness, delicate songs for his small sister Vetch, whose joy of childhood was not to be quenched because there was a day of sorrow on its way to her. The young man was true, in short, to everything but his dinner.

Happy are they who in youth have some acquaintanceship among the Fairies of the Hours. Aster, the noon Fairy, was Trigonel's good friend. She had come to him in his childhood, when he rolled on his back among the cowslips of the meadow. Then she appeared, and always, like the sheen of a maiden in gold armour, with long locks of golden hair. A plume like a flash of light waved over the diamond helmet beneath which glanced her blue eyes, more radiant than all. To other sight than that of Trigonel she was a ray, and nothing more. At mid-day, Papilion and Peaflower gave their minds to their meat; so that they did not see, as they must have seen had they but dined at half-past twelve o'clock, the sunshine that at noon, even when all the upper air was thick with fog and sleet, would glitter daily for a little while about their boy. He had told his parents often and openly enough that he stayed from his dinner to talk with the Noon Fairy; but they only grieved that he should joke upon so serious a matter as the being late at meals.

Trigonel stood under a green oak in the autumn wood, leaning against the mighty heap of fagot bundles that he had prepared since sunrise. The light of his Fairy shone on his brown face and dingy clothes, and made the fagots glow as if they were ablaze. Grasshoppers chirped in the light, butterflies fluttered through it, and the cups of the golden acorns overhead gleamed like cut jewels. Aster sat at the youth's feet, with her helmet off. She held between her fondling palms the hand from which the axe had fallen, and was dazzling him by looking up into his face.

"Farewell," she said. "You are a man. Work henceforth by yourself. Each of my days, remember, is but for an hour, and yet you will be giving life to me all the hours through, while you are brave and open as the noon."

Trigonel laughed. "Am I to add twenty-three hours to the one that is your life? It is but fair, then, that you should beg me a spare minute of your father. You have told me that he is a great magician, owner of the sand-heaps by the border of the endless sea, where each grain of the sand is a minute, and each drop of the flood an everlasting age. Surely the old man would not deny his daughter one spadeful of sand. You know that you want to give it as a keepsake to your friend."

"Ah, me!" sighed Aster; "but you ask that as a keepsake which may cause you to forget me. Wear in your cap my better gift, this crystal; it will be a star to me while you are true; and take care not to wear it in the sun if ever you and honesty be parted. For the other gift, say nothing. My father, who flies by unseen, grants you your wish."

Aster slid back into the sun. The incredulous youth, with a cheery laugh, looked upward, shaking his black hair at her, and waving with both hands his farewell as she flashed from sight. Then, being left alone, he turned his face towards his dinner.

There was a narrow belt of moor between the forest in which Trigonel cut wood and his father's cottage. The sun was hot on the dry turf, and there was a dropping fire among the pods of the whin-blossoms that were scattering their seeds with the pop of a Fairy cannonade. Suddenly the air was chill, the wind screamed through the forest, and the forest itself was not to be seen. Overhead shone the sun, there was blue day over the cottage roof, beyond was a far prospect over field, and copse, and stream. But Trigonel looked back upon the blank of night, through which the wind rushed wailing and sobbing. Mightier than the wind was presently a sound as of the stroke of hugest wings by which the air had been thus beaten to tempest. Then the roar ceased, the storm rolled back, and the great giant Time, with a face high and hard as a mountain-top, and with his beard rolling like a cloud among the clouds, stood still over Trigonel. One huge arm he upreared, and with the gesture of a reveller, swept his great hour-glass through the upper sky.

"Spill! spill!" cried Trigonel. "Crack me a hole in your glass, and give me of your sands."

Father Time fixed his eyes on the youth, but said nothing. Putting one hand into the robe about his breast, he drew out what seemed to be a leathern purse well filled, and dropped it at his feet; then, with a frown, spread his wide wings again, and passed on in the hurricane he raised. When Time beats with his wings in angry flight we may be thrown by the wild weather he makes, as Trigonel was, unexpectedly upon our faces. Trigonel, when the darkness passed and left him in the sun again—while it obscured the distant prospect of field, copse, and stream—perceived with joy that he had fallen so that his nose struck into a sandbag. Cruel or kind, Father Time had granted him his wish, and had presented him with as much as he could carry on his back of that choice sand in which the grains are minutes. Trigonel's heart was lighter than his step as, shouldering his bag, he slowly tottered on to his cold dinner.

CHAPTER II.

TIME WASTED.

But the dinner was not cold when Trigonel entered the empty kitchen. It was the second hour of afternoon, and the old white hen, who should have smoked at twelve upon the table, was a black hen, smoking by the fire in company with her new kindred the cinders. It was dull company, for in the ashy grate the coals had been a good deal put out by the boiling over of the saucepans. The clean dinner plates were still upon their shelf.

"Little Vetch! Mother!" the youth cried in terror as he entered. But there was no answer. Dropping his sandbag heedlessly upon the floor, and without staying to close the cottage door, Trigonel hurried up the ladder to the sleeping-loft. There was his father dying. Vetch, poor maid! trembling, weeping, fondling, lay on the bed nestled to Papilion's panting breast, and at the bed-head knelt the mother, with her whole soul fixed upon her husband. Trigonel, kneeling beside her, put his strong, rough arm about her neck, and bowed his head upon the coverlet.

"O, boy! it snaps my heart," the mother said. "Thirty years my good man, and more life the more love. O, for a little, little more time; till we go together. O, for a little, little time! But a few minutes are left him."

"Minutes, mother!" Trigonel cried, jumping up. "A little time!" At the word he was down the ladder. In the room below he fell upon a select party of porkers that had found their way in, and were thrusting hungry snouts into his treasure bag. There never was a man yet who secured himself a little spare time but a part of it was eaten by the pigs.

Trigonel seized a handful of the sand as the pigs took their leave. They were none of them the better, he saw, for their meal. Time, he thought, is a thing to hold and not to swallow. Hurrying back, therefore, to the sick-bed, he pressed some of the sand into Papilion's failing grasp. It was clutched eagerly, and in that instant life flowed back upon the dying.

Death-bed life was in this way prolonged. It soon appeared that while Papilion had in his hand some of the sand, he was the master of so much Time as he held. A grain of the sand vanished with each minute that went, but till the bag was empty the old man might live. For many years he could be kept thus balanced on the point of death.

Dame Peaflower soon put a check on the loose handling of the precious grains. Counting them into sixties and double sixties, she had them sewn up carefully into small one-hour and two-hour bags. Of these some were again stitched together into twelve and twenty-four-hour packets.

Had her husband's life depended only on her punctuality in keeping him supplied with Time, it was secure. But it depended also on his own grasp of the Fairy gift. In a little while he became weary of the days beyond his span, impatient of the fist for ever clenched that his wife tied up like a pudding when he dozed, lest the hand loosened in sleep might let his life slip through its fingers. Therefore, one day, when Trigonel and Vetch were both gone to the wood, and when his dame was nursing him, Papilion, raising his head from his pillow, kissed her quietly, and while he thus took her attention slipped the freshly-supplied twelve-hour bag out of his palm into her bosom. Then he sank back with a smile that never changed.

"He was quite right," afterwards said Peaflower to her son. "I'd seen myself, dear as he was and is, his life had been kept too long to the fire. It isn't only meat that can be overdone. If I were you, boy, I would throw away that sackful of leisure. Strict to time and ready to the minute is worth any heap of odd minutes to spare."

In the old days, when the kitchen clock might have been set by the ways of its mistress, it had never come into the mind of Dame Peaflower to tell even her son that she was a punctual woman. Punctuality was nature to her—no more talked of than digestion by the healthy. Now, however, she made daily assertion of her good old principles against the heap of odd minutes that tempted her. They were so handy. For the sands that had added minutes to the life of which the time was out, gave also to healthy people time outside the common day. Sixty grains held in the hand melted into an hour, of which no record was kept by clock or sun. If little Vetch wanted two hours of play instead of one, she took a sixty-grain packet of Trigonel's sand; went out at eleven, played for two hours, and yet was home again at noon to dinner. If Madam Peaflower had a day's washing to get through, she would hold a linen bag of sand between her little finger and her palm, while she rubbed in the suds with the other three fingers and thumb. It was not easy work, but a day's washing had been got through in that way, upon one occasion, between eleven o'clock and one minute past eleven, when the poor Peaflower was so tired and weary that she would much rather have gone to bed than cooked the dinner. The sand being at hand, no little delays were heeded. There was always time for everything. At one second to twelve it was not too late to roast an ox before the clock struck. Always time for everything was on its way to become no time for anything with the most punctual of living creatures—and how tired she was? Although the clock took no note of her added work, she felt it in her bones. The Fairy-sand gave time, not strength, beyond the common bounds. Then, too, if she was tired, how fagged was Trigonel! That young man, eager to earn for his mother and sister silk attire, sometimes would make his arms ache with twelve hours of chopping between breakfast and dinner. And when he did come home to dinner, very likely he would find his mother fast asleep upon the floor. Always oppressed by fatigue, she was apt to drop asleep suddenly and unexpectedly. Even when she had in her hand the Fairy-sand, it would then slip from her hold, and the hours of the day would march in procession over her, till Trigonel came home and woke her up. Little Vetch, too, when she had overplayed herself, would drop about the house like a fly in November. Sometimes even Trigonel the brave, who was so haggard that he looked like an old man, went off into a sound morning sleep over his woodcutting. Then, if by chance it happened that his mother and Vetch were snoring on the floor at home, the sun might set before they all came to themselves, and wondered whether they had had their dinner.

Vetch was the first to find that the natural day had the right number of hours for her. While her mother and her brother were still worrying and wearying themselves, she, meddling no longer with the Fairy-sand, budded and blossomed into the full beauty of her maidenhood. The mother's housekeeping had fallen into such confusion of hours, that the cheerful and busy daughter took that charge out of her hands. It was Vetch now who, setting her ways by the sun, kept up a wholesome order in all household affairs; who made out the time of the true noon by setting on the kitchen table the meat she herself had cooked; and who sought to lessen the unruliness, not only of Trigonel, but also of the good Dame Peaflower herself.

"Mother," she said, one day, when they were shelling peas together at the kitchen table, "Poppy, the ploughboy, knows a great deal."

"Ah!" said Peaflower.

"What do you think he told me yesterday?"

"Well, I think I can guess."

"No," Vetch answered, with a bright smile and the flicker of a blush; "you guess nothing important. Poppy and I only talk about important things." While she spoke, Trigonel entered hastily, crying out, "Where's the sand, mother?—be quick!"

"Why, what's the matter, boy?"

Trigonel, with a large packet of sand in his hand, and the whole bag on his shoulder, had only time to say, before he hurried out—

"Grand notion of Poppy's! Ducks for dinner? I shall be back in the cracking of a peascod!"

CHAPTER III.

A FORTUNE MADE IN NO TIME.

Poppy had simply been suggesting, as a confidential family friend, that Fairy gifts have nothing at all to do with ordinary life. The sand in Trigonel's bag probably was worth a thousand gold pieces a grain to somebody. He had heard of a King who would have given his throne for two minutes of time. If kings frequently made such offers, Trigonel might furnish his kitchen with a fine set of a dozen thrones, instead of the four old oaken chairs that his father had chopped out of the forest. Magic tools could be meant only for working upon magic stuff. Dolt of a Trigonel! To get no more out of his Fairy-sand than a few silver crowns more profit by his wood-cutting! Let him shoulder his bag of minutes, and hold some of the sand tight in his hand, while he looked out for great adventures. Let him always have sand in his fist, and he might, if he did not rest too easily content, step out of his door to come back with his fortune made in no time. So he did.

That is the Prince Marattin who comes galloping across the plain, where there is a distant prospect from the cottage-door of field and copse and stream. Field and copse and stream—and mountains where there were no mountains last night. The plain was being changed into a valley among high and tumbled rocks, while Prince Marattin spurred for life towards the one opening still left on the side of the forest.

"Out of the way, bagman!" said the Prince, as Trigonel, standing before him, seized the reins. But that youth, taking the horse by his right foreleg, thrust a four-hour packet of sand between the hoof and the shoe, and then, flinging his sand-bag across the horse's neck, himself jumped up behind his gracious Highness.

"I am in peril of life! Down, fellow!" the Prince cried. "Never mind that," Trigonel answered. "Take a good grip of my bag that lies before you, and no matter what your peril is, you shall get out of it."

The Prince, who was in danger enough to grasp at a straw, fastened, of course, at once upon the sand-bag.

"Now," Trigonel said, "be easy, my lord. Our time's our own." The Prince Marattin and his horse were as white as the miller with long scampering through all the dust they raised. Trigonel, now sitting behind his Highness, wiped a large piece of his back with his coat-sleeve, and saw that he wore copper armour. "Only copper!" he said to himself. "You poor halfpenny Prince! Where shall I find the Crown Prince who wears silver?" Marattin saw that, although his horse had changed its pace for that of a mere beast of burden, not another stone was added to the ring of rocks, so he said nothing until they had passed through the opening towards the forest. Over that they saw the giants striding, as men stride over grass, every one with a lot of mountains on his back.

"Wonderful man!" said Marattin then. "You have helped me through the prison wall these enemies of mine were building, and have brought me to where they will rain mountains over us till we are crushed. How shall I thank you?"

"A giant helps me who is stronger than them all," said Trigonel. "Amble on; we have time." The army of giants stood like a wilderness of sublime statues, every one with the sign, and no more than the sign, of life and motion in his limbs, as the horse stumbled among the patches of trees, crushed and trampled by the great feet treading over them, with Marattin, Trigonel, and the sand-bag all on his back.

"Now," Trigonel said, when they had passed from between the thickest pair of giant legs, and were toiling over a great hillock of foot, "my lord, the Bagman will bid you good-day. I must shoulder my bag and begone."

"Not leaving me to ruin——"

"No! for your horse and copper armour I will give you two hours to escape with. You are a king?"

"Since yesterday!"

Trigonel did not like the fellow. The cold of his heart struck through his eyes; his long, pointed moustaches were like bayonets, and under his mouth there hung a beard like a false tongue.

"Very well," said the youth. "If you want another two hours, have them. Take my cap and leathern jerkin. Give me your horse and copper armour, and we part."

So the Prince went on his way afoot in cap and leathern jerkin, with a two-hour packet of time clenched in his fist. Trigonel took his gracious Highness's address and trotted away, with his sack before him and the copper on his back.

Always taking care that there should be plenty of spare time in his hand and plenty tucked between one of the horse's front hoofs and his shoe, Trigonel travelled at his leisure. He went forward till the helmets of the giants, when looked back upon, appeared like distant mountain crests; and there was a large city before him, out of which had been brought, by a great crowd, a knight in armour, covered with dust that the crowd raised. He had a rope tied round his neck, and sat in the hangman's cart. As Trigonel rode up to him, the Knight began to cry with might and main, "Behold the enemy! He of the copper armour is Marattin! Seize him, and let him tell you that I am his enemy and not his spy!"

"I wear Marattin's armour," Trigonel said, taking off the helmet. "But whoever knows him may see that I am not he."

The Knight, leaping out of the cart, ran forward to seize Trigonel's hand, and said, "Great hero, have you vanquished him? Shout, people, for the suppressor of Marattin!" And the people would have shouted themselves thirsty again for much less than that. Trigonel put his hand on the Knight's shoulder to answer him, and saw that here was a man dressed in silver armour. "Only silver!" he said to himself. "You poor Crown-Prince! Where shall I find the Sovereign Emperor who wears nothing but gold?" But he spoke to himself so that he was overheard.

"That Emperor is my father," said the Silver Knight. Of course you wish to carry your good tidings to him."

"At once," said Trigonel, giving time to the Silver Knight. "The people will not lose a minute, though we ride for a month and leave them standing here. Borrow that mare out of the hangman's cart, let me see to her shoes, and ride with me to the country of the Emperor, your father."

So Trigonel rode with the Silver Prince into the city, leaving the crowd exactly as they found it; every listener in it with his ear turned; every one who spoke or hallooed with his mouth still open, his gesture fixed, or the cap he had thrown still in the air.

"We had made undersea gangways," said the Silver Prince, "out of my father's island into most lands round about. Suddenly coming up into this city by a path just opened, I was taken for a spy of Marattin, whom I hate, and against whose treacheries all men are watching. I believe him to be now surrounded by the giants that will crush him; yet if you yourself are not his vanquisher, how came you by his armour?"

"Never mind," Trigonel answered. They had passed through a mountain cavern near the city walls, and were now traversing an endless tunnel, lighted by towers open to the sky. To each of them there was an ascent by winding terraces. "May we not mount one of these towers?" From the battlemented summit of the first they climbed Trigonel and the Prince looked out over the sea. A stiff breeze caught their helmet plumes, and the salt spray broke over them. A dotted line of towers led their eyes to a white streak on the horizon.

"That," said the Prince, stretching arm and finger to it, "is the country of my golden father, which strikes root through the foundations of the sea, and becomes neighbour to all nations."

The way seemed to be long to the dominions of the Emperor in Gold. At last they were reached, and Trigonel restored to a magnificent father the young Prince whom he had saved out of the hangman's hands.

This Prince was but a younger son. Eldest son of the golden Lord was the illustrious Duke (the name of whose rank has been corrupted into Duck) of Diamonds. The Duke of Diamonds was paved with precious stones from top to toe, and wore by his side a sword of many jewels beaten into a blade at the forge of the Fairies. Trigonel, open as noon, told all his story to the King, confessing candidly that he had come abroad to make his fortune. He had it in copper, when he bought for one hundred and twenty grains of sand the armour of Marattin. He had not asked for it in silver when he saved the Silver Knight, because he learnt that the Emperor in Gold was his father. Now, however, he owned that he felt partiality towards the Duke of Diamonds.

"Well," said the King, "say no more. I will not buy your sand, because we are in this land already a hundred years ahead of the rest of the world, but you shall go home in a suit of armour like my eldest son's, and that alone is worth a common dukedom. Possibly, you have a sister?"

"Sire, I have."

"Then shall my son, the Diamond Duke, who wants a wife, ride home with you himself, and if he should like your sister, he will marry her."

So it was done; and as this is no traveller's tale, I need not describe how they made the journey. Trigonel, dressed in diamonds, rode beside the Diamond Duke, who was mounted upon a great piebald horse in sapphire harness. They were both shouting, "House, ho!" outside the cottage of Dame Peaflower, before Vetch, with her dainty little thumb, had scraped the peas out of the shell she was cracking when her brother stepped into the sun to make his fortune.

Mother and daughter hurried to the threshold; but the Diamond Duke, when he looked at Vetch, immediately saw that she would be the best wife in the world for him. So the first words he said to her (and she was the first person to whom he spoke) were, "Marry me." But Vetch had her fortune made already in the love of her dear oracle, Poppy, the ploughboy. Therefore, she said, "No, thank you," to the Duke of Diamonds. Dame Peaflower explained to the Duke that Poppy, although only a ploughboy, knew a great deal, and had on this very occasion been her son Trigonel's adviser.

"Better still," said the Duke. "We in our land want a wise Vizier quite as much as I want a wife. Poppy knows a great deal. Poppy's advice has clothed your son in diamonds. Fetch Poppy, and he shall be our Minister of State. The tender little Vetch shall be his wife. You, sir, who have saved my life, shall be my friend, and we will all take care of the good mother. Let us dine together, and then start."

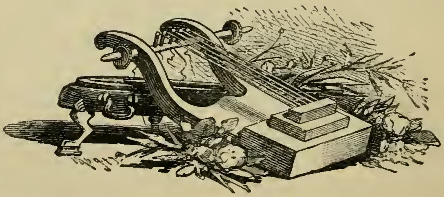
Vetch was willing to go if Poppy thought he would like a State Minister's business as well as ploughing. Poppy was sent for, and the affair was settled. So the Widow Peaflower sat down at noon to her dinner of ducks and green peas, with the betrothed Poppy and Vetch, one on each side of her. Her ducks were carved by the Duke of Diamonds himself. But Trigonel, who was gone out to feed the horses, had not come in when the ducks were cut. His eye had been caught by a well-remembered flash descending swiftly from the sun, and lost behind the mountains that now made a valley of his native plain. The flash was Aster, the Noon Fairy, ablaze with wrath, having in rigid grasp her downward-pointed spear.

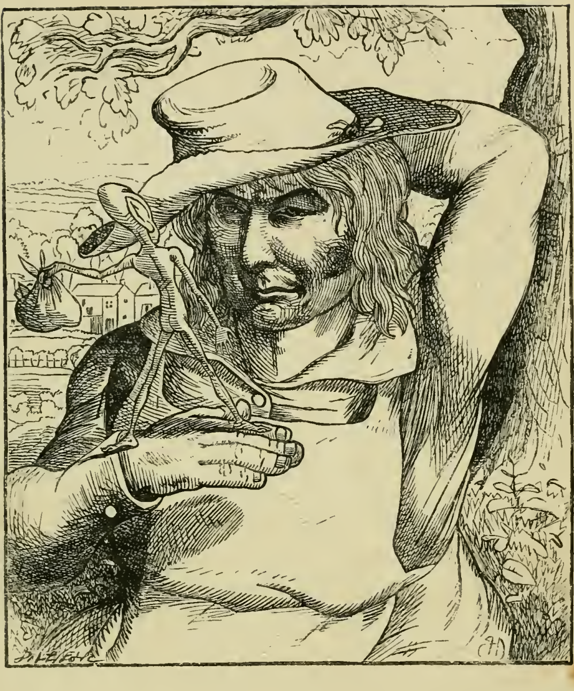
When Trigonel exchanged his cap and jerkin for Marattin's armour, he had left in his cap, too thoughtlessly, the crystal which his playfellow, the Fairy, had set in its front.

Over Marattin's forehead it had clouded into a dull black, and when, under the noonday sun, the wicked Prince was about to kill a beggar who demurred to his demand of free gift of the broken meat he carried, suddenly the magic crystal stretched into the semblance of a black, lean hand, with knotty joints and cruel nails, that beckoned vengeance down. Against him who had dared to wear on his false front the crystal of the Noon Fairy, Aster herself struck the spear. Marattin died thus of a sunstroke.

Then the appeased giants went back to their caves, leaving the mountains they had raised as records of their wrath; and Aster, playful as of old, but with a whisper of rebuke, appeared again to Trigonel, who had his crystal back, clear as at first.

Again, therefore, the youth had missed his midday dinner, but he dined at one o'clock, and afterwards was ready to depart, with Peaflower, Vetch, and Poppy, to the wonderful land, where the Duke of Diamonds would be their bosom friend. There is nothing else to be told, except that before starting, Trigonel, by the advice of Counsellor Poppy, scattered his bag of minutes to the winds, and ever since he did that, grains of spare time, seldom to be caught, are thought to have been dancing upon puffs and eddies of wind up and down the world.





THE STAVESACRE FAIRIES.

THIS is the tale of Teel the shoemaker, Whirlwig the hatter, and Surmullet the tailor.

Teel was a shoemaker, about whom very few people knew how well he understood his business. So one evening the poor fellow, slipping dolefully out of the town in which he starved, went for a walk on a neighbouring common. It was a small rough piece of broken ground, ragged with briar, fern, and furze, scratched over with deep rutted paths, drilled into with rabbit-holes, here and there scooped also into forgotten sand-pits, and dabbled with pools. At one end a steep and jagged lump of sand-rock cropped up through the brambles. On the top of the bit of rock the shoemaker sat down to think. From that height there was a view over the meadows round about the common. Behind him they sloped up into a line of bare downs, with the white chalk glimmering here and there through their green banks. Before him the rich landscape was warm with trees. Alders and great willows were clustered near the river; oaks gathered in knolls about the slopes of the deer-park; pear, plum, and other fruit-trees overtopped the little country-town, and all the yellow roads that led out from Stavesacre into the world at large were fringed with blackberry, wild rose, and honeysuckle hedges, broken with elms, and upon one side, beyond the bridge, raised to the rank of an avenue with lines of poplar.

Trees gathered about the quiet town so closely as to hide all but the great mossy church-tower from the eyes of Teel, as he sat on the sand-rock, with his feet dangling over its sides, and looked about him. Already the mild evening star was in the sky, the rooks were flocking to their nests in a small wood that dipped over the riverside, where the stream flowed between the farther slopes of the smooth park. The distant peal of the town-bells told the shoemaker that Hodge, Peter, and Jeff, cobblers and bell-ringers, had met for practice in the belfry before spending (prosperous men!) a social evening together in the parlour of the Sandhopper's Arms.

When the bell-ringing was over there were more stars in the darkening sky, and presently the moon rose, large and red, from behind the wood in which the rooks were sleeping. A bend of the river was alight directly. All was so still that Teel heard now and then the faint creak of the insects stirring in the bushes of the common and the whirr of the night-moth as she flew by.

"Heigho!" he sighed. "I get nothing by this thinking; so I will go home to my good dame."

He was about to rise, when a young rabbit leapt into his lap. The rabbit tamely suffered him to pull its ears.

"Silly puss!" said the shoemaker; "when you jump into the lap of a man who has an empty cupboard, don't you know that you are good to eat? But never fear, small creature. As you trust me, you shall take no harm."

"Very well," said the rabbit—no longer a rabbit; for, indeed, he was a curiously little man in grey body-clothes, but without coat or hat, and with his feet quite naked. He had a tiny bundle in one hand, which he held up to Teel.

"I hope, my good fellow, I may trust you. Make me a pair of shoes out of the leather in this bundle, and return me all the pieces. I will pay you well, and bring you some more custom, if your fit is good."

"Fit good!" said the neglected artist. "Those ignorant people of Stavesacre are content to wear clumps on their feet. They fatten no less than three cobblers with their custom, and have suffered me, a proper shoemaker, to starve. Yes, sir! I can fit a dainty foot like yours, sir, in a way to show you something of my art. Am I to send the shoes, or will your honour call for them?"

"I will call at your house for them," the Fairy said. "Be ready, if you can, at this hour, this day week."

At the appointed hour Teel was quite ready; and Till, his good wife, had been so careful to help him in obeying the wish of his Fairy customer, that not a shred of leather or thread—though it were but a shred no bigger than a morsel of a line of spider's web—was left on or below the table at which Teel had worked. All was put, with the shoes themselves, into the tiny bag. Then as they sat—too poor to afford candle—in the light that was half moonlight and half twilight, the old couple suddenly saw the little grey Fairy busy about that bag. He weighed it first in one hand, and then in the other. He opened it, took out the shoes, turned out and examined all the pieces. Then he put the pieces back, and, sitting down upon Till's spectacle-case, put on the shoes. When they were on, he got up and danced about in them to try their fit. They fitted perfectly. Advancing at last to the edge of the table, he said, "Brother Teel, I am authorised to appoint you shoemaker in ordinary to the Fairies of the Downs and Commons. Remove, therefore, to your new house on the sand-rock in Stavesacre Common where you will have plenty of custom and good pay as long as we may trust you."

"Oh, sir!" said Till, "you may trust my old man with shoes of gold."

"He will find shoes of gold that are his own in his new house. I pay them to him in exchange for these. There is a piping hot supper also waiting for you both in your new house, so I advise you to move into it at once. You need take nothing with you. Tools, furniture, and even clothes, are there already."

Tools, furniture, and new clothes—yes. But nevertheless, after the Fairy vanished, Teel and Till, indulging themselves with the extravagance of a candle, searched their house through, and filled a large bundle with household treasure. There was the Sacred Book, in which they had read to each other; there were the little clothes, at which Till worked when she had been a younger (but still not a young) wife; and the small shoes Teel made for the baby, that was still the baby to their hearts as when it was lost, a score of years ago.

Then Till had to wipe the dust from her mother's Cookery Book, given to her on her marriage. That edifying work had been neglected of late, for want of the eggs and butter, without which, in its opinion, nothing could be brought into being. But there was the mother's name, in her own hand, written across the title-page, worth all the dainties that were ever fried. Till had more relics, and the foolish shoemaker had treasures put away in drawers—dead flowers, faded ribbons. "Do you know, Till," he said, "I must have you carry to the new house the whole of your white wedding-dress that is in yonder worm-eaten old press." So off they went at last under the moonlight, he with a pack and she with a pack.

When they came to the skirt of the common they saw all the windows lighted in a neat little white house on the top of the sand-rock. When they had climbed the sand-rock, the cottage-door opened to them of its own accord, and a delicate smell of boiled rabbit and onions kissed their noses. In a dainty little parlour, that dish, dear alike to Teel and Till, smoked ready for them. There were hot mealy potatoes too, boiled as few but the Fairies can succeed in boiling them; also, there were two bright glasses set beside a foaming jug of ale. "What a sweet perfume of meat!" said Teel. "And onion," added Till, who was so much moved by the sight of a comfortable hot supper and the smell of onion, that she wiped her eyes as she sat down.

A half-open door was opposite Teel's seat, and there was a lighted room beyond. "I must just run and peep in," said the poor shoemaker. So he ran across and peeped, and what he saw was his new workshop. There were his counter and his cases, and his shoemaker's bench, and the tiniest little tools, made with broad handles to suit his grasp. But sitting all round the shop, row behind row, were thousands of little Fairies in grey body-clothes, without hats, coats, or shoes, who cried as he peeped in, "Good evening to you, gossip. We are all waiting for you to measure us when you have supped!"

Before Teel could answer them, there was a clatter behind him that obliged him to turn round. It was caused by the falling of a large pair of gold shoes through the ceiling to the floor, followed by a cry of "Shoes for you, shoemaker!" Thereupon all the Fairies in the shop began to sing:—

"Shoes! Wonderful Shoes!
Safe on the water, safe on the land,
Ready to run at the word of command."

Whirlwig was a hatter, who had made felt caps for the ploughmen of Stavesacre, though he was clever enough to fit with the glossiest of hats the head even of a crocodile. He had plenty of custom for his caps; but he would have poured his earnings out as easily as he poured beer into his throat at the Sandhopper's Arms, if his wife Willwit had not been careful and honest as she was. A month after Teel had left the town, and gone to live in his new cottage on the sand-rock, Whirlwig was seeing a comrade home over the common after a supper at the club of Noisy Dogs, at which he was perpetual vice-president. On the other side of the common his friend left him, and went on to his own village. Whirlwig turned back to Stavesacre, but in the middle of the common he lay down (as he afterwards said) to think a bit. "Dame Willwit," he thought to himself, "will say there's little enough in my pocket. Poor woman! She don't know what a famous supper I got for my money. I'll go home and tell her of it."

He was trying to rise, when a young rabbit jumped into his lap, and tamely suffered him to seize it by the ears. "Heigho!" cried the hatter, "here's a supper for the good dame too. I'll take you home to her, trust me."

"Very well," said the rabbit—no longer a rabbit, being indeed a curiously little man in grey body-clothes, without coat or hat, but with the neatest of small shoes upon his feet. "Very well, my good fellow, I hope I may trust your wife at least to see that you deal fairly." Then, holding up a tiny bundle, he said, "Make me a cap out of the felt in this bundle, and return me all the pieces. I will pay you well, and bring you some more custom, if your fit is good."

The hatter laughed with defiance. "Fit good!" he cried. "Though I have been making caps for blockheads all my days, I know what I know; you shall wear, sir, what will make you feel the real use of your head. Am I to send the hat, or will your honour call for it?"

The Fairy said he would call at that same hour on that day week. The little cap was ready in good time. Whirlwig had made a careless litter of the pieces of felt cut off while he worked, but Willwit, his prudent wife, not only had gathered them all carefully into the tiny bag, together with the new cap, she had also locked the door of the house, and put the key into her pocket, so that her husband could not help being at home to receive his customer. The Fairy came as he had come to Teel, and being satisfied with what he found, advanced to the edge of the table, and said, "Brother Whirlwig, I am authorised to appoint you hatter in ordinary to the Fairies of the Downs and Commons. Remove, therefore, to your new house by the roadside on Stavesacre Common, where you will have plenty of custom and good pay as long as we may trust you."

"Oh, sir!" said Willwit, "there's not a truer soul than my old man's when he only gives himself time to consider about what he does. But I do wish he'd make himself a considering cap—I do, indeed!"

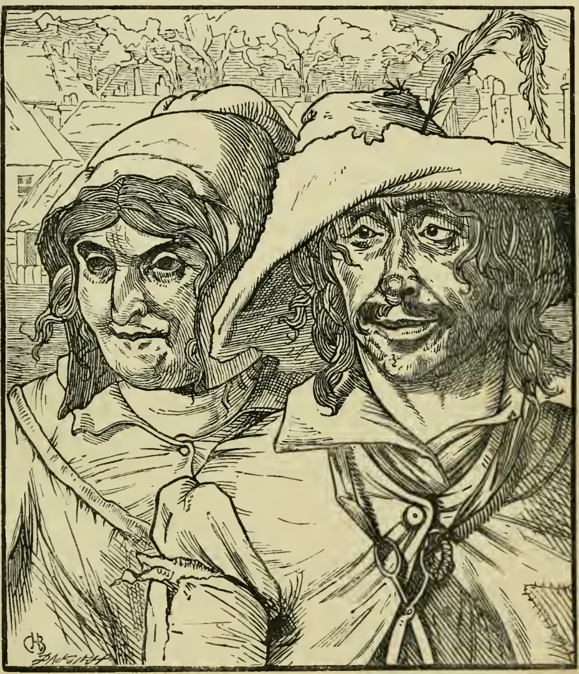
"He will find a considering cap in his new house. I pay it to him in exchange for this. Supper is laid there, Dame Willwit, for you and your children; so I advise you to remove at once. As for your good man, he has supped already. Everything you will want is there; you need take nothing."

The Fairy was gone, and Willwit at once began to get her seven children out of bed. When they were dressed, the whole family went under the moonlight to the common, where there was a new white house on the turf by the roadside. The house door opened for them of its own accord. In the snug kitchen there was a hot rabbit-pie upon the table, large enough for all, and Whirlwig was inclined to indulge in a second supper; but on peeping into a second room from which light shone through the partly open door, he found in his new shop thousands of tiny customers, all eager to be measured without one moment's delay. So he set to work while his wife and children ate and drank, and the savoury steam of the pie made his mouth water. Once he ran back when he heard something fall to the floor in the next room. It was a felt cap that had tumbled through the ceiling, followed by a cry of "A cap for you, hatter!" Thereupon all the Fairies in the shop began to sing:—

"Cap! Wonderful Cap!
Wear it for counsel; and when you despair,
The advice of the Cap will relieve you of care."

Surmullet was a clever tailor, but a rascal; and his wife, Smull, was no better than himself. He had lost his trade by robbery of customers, and lived by robbery upon the roads. He was lurking at night in the bottom of one of the sandpits on Stavesacre Common to waylay a traveller, when the rabbit jumped also upon his knee. The rabbit would have had its neck wrung in an instant if it had not changed in less than an instant into the form of the little Fairy with grey body-clothes, a neat little cap, and perfect shoes, wanting only a coat to be completely dressed. When Surmullet received from this tiny customer the order for a coat, he said that he would rather take a coat than make a coat, but for all that he would fit the little gentleman so that he should think he had two skins.

Surmullet also was to finish his work in a week, and did finish it. The little man looked grave when he came for his coat and missed the pieces. But he, nevertheless, formally declared Surmullet's appointment as tailor to the Fairies of the Downs and Commons, and invited him to his new place of business at the bottom of the sandpit in Stavesacre Common. There he would find plenty of custom and good pay as long as he was to be trusted.



"Trust!" sneered his wife. "One man is as safe as another, for the matter of that. There's no man who wouldn't own himself thief if he had on a coat of confession."

"You will find such a coat in your new house," the Fairy said. "I pay it in exchange for this."

Surmullet and his wife were eager to be gone. The bottom of the sandpit was a newly-established place of business for them; but the advantage of a house built there, in which they might be always lurking, and from which they might at any time pounce out upon a traveller, was to be secured without an hour's delay. So they went to the common, and found that there was really a white house built at the bottom of the largest sandpit. Going down into it they found no supper, but a crowd of little men, angrily waiting to be measured for their coats. As they looked dangerous, Surmullet began measuring directly. While he did so you may be sure that a coat fell through the ceiling, followed by the cry of "A coat for you, tailor!" and the song of all the little customers:—

"Coat! Wonderful Coat!
What you do wrongly, and what you do well,
The Coat of Confession will make you tell."

Now the shoemaker, the hatter, and the tailor worked hard each of them for a twelvemonth and a day, before they had finished making shoes, and hats, and coats for all the Fairies of the Downs and Commons. Teel worked hard with honest will, and lived in luxury. Whirlwig worked hard because his wife looked after him, and while he worked the Fairies gave him famous suppers. Surmullet worked hard because the Fairies frightened him, and every man who is not true is a coward.

At the end of a twelvemonth and a day the Fairies of the Downs and Commons were all fitted with their new coats, caps, and shoes, and as these articles were made of very durable material, they would outlast the lives of the tailor, hatter, and shoemaker who made them. Teel was the first to finish. The house on the sand-rock vanished when the last Fairy was shod, and the tradesman to the Fairies went back with his old wife to their cottage in the town. They took with them nothing but what they had brought thence, except the golden Shoes of Safety. A month afterwards, Whirlwig, the hatter, came back with his wife and seven children, richer for all his work only by the Considering Cap; and Surmullet returned next, with the Coat of Confession on his arm.

They had all been kept so closely to their work, that they had never been outside the white houses, invisible to other eyes, in which the Fairies had supplied their wants. They had been completely and unaccountably lost out of Stavesacre. Their houses remained vacant, because new people never came into that quiet place, and the settled inhabitants were so entirely settled, that a Stavesacre man never so much as thought of moving from one house into another. When, as it rarely happened, anybody went away from Stavesacre, somebody painted on a window of the house he quitted that it was To Let. Then it remained empty until natural increase of population in the place itself would, in the course, perhaps, of many generations, cause another tenant to be reared. The process was a very slow one. In the half-century before the time of which this story tells, the increase of the population had been only from two thousand one hundred and five to two thousand one hundred and eleven.

When Teel and Till came back into the town, and said they had only been as far as the common, where they had spent the year in shoemaking for the Fairies, Stavesacre said that was a fine tale, but no doubt they had their reasons for being secret; and opinion was divided as to the way in which Teel came by his gold shoes. A month afterwards, Stavesacre looked out of window to see Whirlwig and Willwit, his wife, tramping in again with their seven children. He, too, said that he had been no farther than the common, where he had been making caps for the Fairies, and was only the richer by a Considering Cap for his pains. The only persons who believed that story were Teel and Till, and Dame Till lost no time in holding consultation with Dame Willwit, and comparing their experience of Fairy patronage.

"I am told," said Till, "that those ne'er-do-wells, Surmullet and his wife, were lost out of town soon after you. Has he been in the same employ, I wonder?"

While the two women talked together, Whirlwig came down-stairs in a rusty blue coat, a stained and soiled red waistcoat, and high walls of shirt-collar about his cheeks. "I am going to sup at the club," he said to his wife as he went out.

"Ah!" sighed Willwit; "the Fairies gave him a Considering Cap, and he always has refused to put it on. A poor man, with a wife and seven children, needs to put on his Considering Cap before he goes to sup at the club; but he shall wear it after he comes home. I will put him to bed in it to-night."

"A famous notion, gossip," said Dame Till. "But what my man is to do with his shoes I wish I could see. He hasn't a fault to be mended, bless his old heart!"

"Or a sorrow to be cured," said her friend, "when you are by."

But Till looked into the empty air, and her fingers strayed towards a lock of baby hair that had lain folded in paper for a score of years upon her bosom.

Willwit took her by the other hand, like a kind gossip as she was, and said, "Yes, though it be twenty years ago, it must be hard to miss your little Clary. And you had but her!"

"If we had but her grave to kneel over!" mourned the good Till. "She may be living with the thieves who stole her, and they may have made her one of them!"

"If she be alive, there is still hope that you may find her. Truly, dear friend, the man would walk on shoes of gold who brought her back to you."

"On shoes of gold!" Till cried. And leaping up, she clapped her hands for joy. "Oh, neighbour, neighbour, let me go!"

"Husband!" she panted, when, out of breath with the haste she had made, she got home to her old man; "put on those Fairy Shoes of Safety, and go out to find our child. My heart tells me they were given you for that."

"But whither shall I go?"

"Put on the shoes and go—'Safe on the water and safe on the land, ready to run at the word of command,' the Fairies said they were. Then bid them carry you to Clary, if she be alive."

"You are right, and I am gone," said Teel. While he was gone, Till went to the old locker, in which she treasured as a relic her white wedding-dress.

At the word of command, the shoes carried Teel swiftly, lightly, through the town. They ran, without touching ground, down the slope to the river, crossed the surface of the water without wetting a sole, and sped over the sward of the deer-park to the wood by the far slopes of the winding stream. The autumn leaves were falling on its sheltered paths, but the wonderful shoes did not stir or tread upon a fallen leaf as they sped on, causing their wearer to flit like a shadow through the underwood, already damp with night-dew. At last, Teel struck into the thickness of a massive oak, and entering its substance, stood still, in the very heart-wood of the mighty trunk, that clipped him about like a cloud.

The brighter for that veil around it and above it was the mossy nest over which Teel now stood still. Here it was that the Fairies of the Wood, who stole her, held his little Clary cradled. Here she was sleeping happily, in form not a day older than when she was lost, soothed by singing from a choir of green wood-fairies, who were her attendants. But when Teel snatched her up, and fell to kissing her, the Fairies sang:—

"Playfellow Clary, nice to steal,
You must go home with Father Teel.
Clary will be our playfellow for good
If father don't leave his Gold Shoes in the wood."

Teel instantly stepped out of the shadow of the oak, and took his shoes off. Their gold rose in a mist that ran along the ground and spread into the trees, until the autumn leaves dropped, yellow and clinking, upon paths that had become strewn with gold. The gnarled trunk of the oak was solid enough when Teel turned his back upon it.

So, without stooping to pick up any of the gold through which he walked, and without flinching when his naked feet trod among thorns, the old shoemaker went through the forest. Slowly, and trembling with joy, he went through the forest, bearing upon his arms the sleeping infant. It was a long walk home, and there was the bridge beyond the poplar avenue to be crossed outside Stavesacre, for which reason his way must be through the main street. But the stars were all out when he reached it, and half the town was already abed. Few saw the old man limping with torn feet over the stones as he went homeward by the light of the crescent moon and of the stars, pressing, with shrivelled, knotted hands, the tender sleeping child to his warm heart.

Till saw him from afar, and ran to him through the night shadows in her yellowish-white wedding-dress. She had been holding solemn festival in this attire, sitting alone in her poor room, and so awaiting the return of Clary. If she thought of an old time, she had not thought it would come back to her so perfectly that Clary would be Baby Clary still. She was a yearling child when lost, and as a yearling child she was returned into her mother's bosom. Age had not hardened the true heart that welcomed her.

It was a dainty sight to see the old dame crooning with love as she wept fast tears over the child that smiled up at her from the lap of muslin and old lace and limp white satin bows. Till pressed its nose into the wreck of the great true-love-knot upon her bosom, and got her thin grey hair into confusion with its golden curls, as she sat lip to lip with it in her agony of joy. Meanwhile, her old man, kneeling before the newly-lighted fire, stirred in their single pot a baby-mess with one of his thin hands. His other hand moved with a wandering touch about his wife and child.

Presently the child was to be fed with a wooden spoon, and grasped the spoon as it was coming to its mouth. Immediately the wood was gold. They were in no joy about that, but in some concern lest there should be an objectionable change made in the gruel. No, that was excellent. And Clary throve like any other child; was healthy, happy, natural, except that she would sometimes murmur a strange Fairy music in her sleep, and that, when touched by her, wood became gold.

By noon next day so many planks, beams, window-frames, and door-posts of the shoemaker's cottage were transmuted into shining gold, that gossip Willwit held her breath when she ran in with something of interest to tell to gossip Till. We know what there was to be told by Willwit. What she had to say to Till was that her good man Whirlwig, waking up that morning with the Considering Cap on his head, had sat up in his bed, and poured out such a stream of wise reflections on the headache he had got, and on the responsibilities he had got; on the necessity of getting a new coat for the boy Daniel, and new shoes for Heartsease, and a new gown for Willwit; on the devotion and prudence of his valuable wife Willwit and his own past wastefulness; on the propriety of instantly resigning his place as Vice-President of Noisy Dogs; of clearing out his shop, and making a great stir, if possible, to procure increase of custom; on the possibility of saving enough for the purchase of a small pony-cart with which he could go in search of customers to the surrounding villages; on the cost of a cart and of a pony; on the average rate of his possible week's earnings in Stavesacre, and on the average weekly cost of a sufficiency of meal, of meat, of butter, of eggs; on the advantages and disadvantages of keeping a pig, and his own powers of building a pigstye; on the number of years it would take to turn by economy a pig into a cow; on the best thing to be done for little Sorrel's cough, and the cause of that pain in the side his wife had been complaining of; and so on, and so on, that he was another man. He had sold ten caps that morning; he was inventing, as a speculation of his own, a grand official hat for the next Mayor of Stavesacre. He had already found her money enough to get a leg of pork and stuffing for their dinner.

"I wouldn't have my good man lose this industry," said Willwit; "no, not if he got, instead of it, your child's wonderful power of gold-making."

"I don't care for the gold-making," said Till, "though I suppose it makes us very rich. That old chair you sit on, now it's made of gold, must be worth something. Take it home, gossip. Nobody need be poor in Stavesacre if this is to last with Clary; but it's so like a disease, that I shall be glad enough to see her cured."

When she said that, a green dwarf with a very long nose peeped in at the door. "Oh, good morning, dame Till," he said. "If you don't wish that child of yours to infect any more wood with a jaundice, let her walk round the room three times in the gold Shoes of Safety. Here they are. If you are in the mind to make that use of them, keep them; if not, let them be cast back into the wood yonder, where your good man left them." The dwarf threw the shoes into the room, and vanished.

Till put little Clary's feet into the shoes directly, and began to guide her tottering.

"Think what you do," said Willwit. "The child's power will give you never-ending wealth."

"I want my own natural and healthy little Clary," Till replied.

"But won't you wait till you have advised with your husband?"

"As to Clary, and all else, my Teel and I are of one heart."

So Clary pattered three times round the room in the gold shoes. After the first round, there was no sign of amendment, for all the wood in the house not changed already became gold. After the second round, everything that was made of cotton, hemp, or flax, the child's clothes, all the linen the two women wore, and their poor cotton gowns, changed into cloth of gold.

"I fear to go round again," said Till. "The disease grows stronger, and the dwarf may have meant only to mock me. Yet I will have trust."

So she went round for the third time, and after that there was no change, but there was not a splinter of wood left in the house with which to try whether the desired change in the child really was effected. The women, dressed as they were in gold from head to foot, dared not go out of doors to fetch a stick. It was lucky for them that at this moment the knave Surmullet and Smull his wife stepped in.

They were then coming in from the common, and as they passed Teel's cottage in the empty country street, were the first to notice the golden window-frames and door-posts, and the brilliant gold door of Teel's cottage. Inside, the room was like a gold mine, with two golden women in it and a golden child.

But a passing boy or two soon spread the news, and all the town had presently turned out to look at the shoemaker's cottage, with golden beams and posts, and doors, and golden thatch. Surmullet and Smull had been hearing wonders inside, while they looked greedily about them, and Smull had fetched a fagot from the yard to put in the child's hand. It remained wood. "A pretty game you have spoiled," she said. "My worthy husband also had a Fairy gift, and who knows what may come of it. Put on your coat, good man."

Surmullet put on the Coat of Confession which he had brought in on his arm, and suddenly began to tell of all his rogueries. In-doors and out-of-doors, all Stavesacre was there to wonder and listen. Surmullet seized upon every man he had cheated or robbed, and made a thoroughly clean breast of his offence; but he was astonished at the good nature with which all his confessions were received.

When Teel came home with the shoe-leather for which he had been to the tanyard two miles down the river, he found himself suddenly seized by the mob of townspeople before and about his cottage, lifted upon men's shoulders, and beset with a great shout of "Teel! Teel! Teel for the next Mayor!" More astonishing still were the shouts of "Bravo, Surmullet!" Though Surmullet was telling half the town that he had robbed and cheated it, yet there he was, speaking the truth. He who went out a year and a day since, a sneak whom no man trusted, and who trusted nobody,—he who was known to be a thief when he used all his cunning to get credit for honesty,—was now held to be honest when he manfully confessed all that was in him, though the all was bad.

Now, the end of the story is, that Surmullet, finding comfort in his Coat of Confession, ceased to be the coward that he had been. He grew to be fearless in speaking the truth, and, from being true in word, soon became true in deed. By shifting his coat slyly and whenever he could to other men's backs, he found that other men, forced to speak all the good and evil that was in them, commonly turned out better than almost anybody else expected. The sensation of being trusted was to Surmullet himself very welcome; and even Smull was content to stand with her husband in the good books of her neighbours.

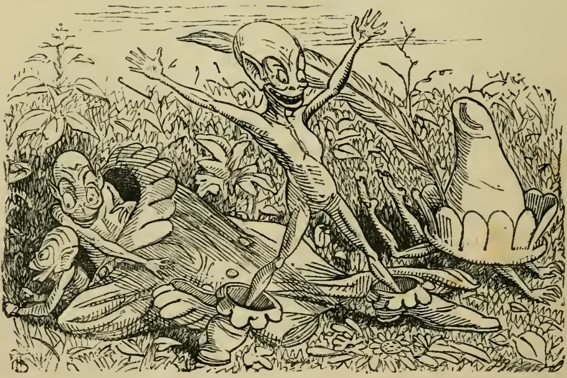
Whirlwig became the most considerate and painstaking man in the whole world.

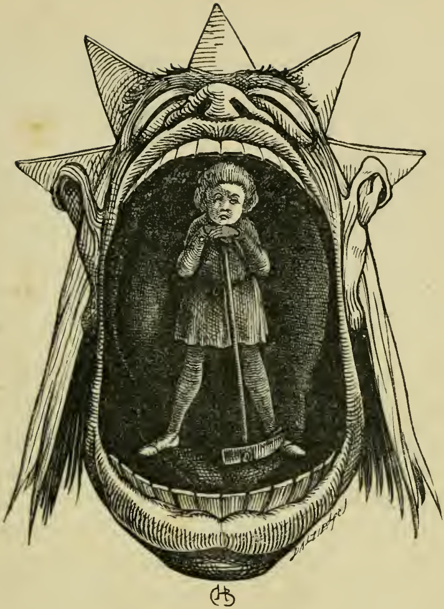
Teel and his wife were the richest people in or out of Stavesacre, after they had given gold away to Whirlwig, to Surmullet, and to every poor neighbour. There was built for them a fine house in the deer-park, where they loved, all their days, the kindest and prettiest of daughters. Teel wore the Mayor's cap that Whirlwig had distinguished himself by inventing. In the second year of his mayoralty, he gave his wonderful Shoes, and, in the same year, Whirlwig and Surmullet, who no longer needed magic help, gave also their Cap and Coat, to be held in perpetual possession by the town-council of Stavesacre.

The Shoes, Coat, and Cap were kept in a strong tower, and committed to the keeping of six faithful warders. Whenever an offence was committed in the town, an officer of justice, putting on the Shoes, commanded them to bring him face to face with the offender. Instantly tracked and seized, the culprit was brought into the presence of the Mayor. There all the witnesses, and the offender himself, wore, when they gave evidence of what they knew, the wonderful Coat of Confession. The whole truth about everything that related to an offence being thus presented to the Mayor, that magistrate put on the wonderful Considering Cap, and arrived at the wisest possible decision of the case. There being no escape for any Stavesacre criminal while the Cap, Coat, and Shoes were there to secure his capture and conviction, nobody played the rogue; and the Stavesacre men lived for a century with so little necessity for keeping their eyes open that they became sleepier than ever.

So it happened that one day all the six warders who kept the apparatus of Stavesacre justice were asleep together in the porch of the tower. When they awoke, Cap, Coat, and Shoes were gone, and half the houses in the town —bolts and bars having long fallen out of use—were robbed that night. The thieves were great grandchildren of Surmullet, and as they crossed Stavesacre Common with a wagon-load of plunder, they threw into one of the pools a bundle, which contained not only the Considering Cap and Coat of Confession, but also the golden Shoes of Safety; for, although these were of solid value, there was great fear of their Fairy power.

Whenever the pools are dragged on Stavesacre Common, if that bundle should be found, let it be forwarded immediately to the Lord Chief Justice.





BARON BLETCH, OF THE HAMMER.

CHAPTER I.

OLD YESTERDAY DISMISSES A LAD FROM HIS SERVICE.

Joe Bletch held the hammer for a carpenter in Sloley, which is one of the provincial towns of Dulmansland.

Dulmansland is the largest kingdom in the world. The traveller who arrives at the coast, and sails over the sea, probably lands only upon another of its provinces when he has crossed the water. This country is almost everywhere flat.

Its hilly parts are uninhabited, and few of them, indeed, are ever trodden by the foot of man. The ascent of steep ground, or any act resembling up-hill work, is, by the custom of the land, treated as suicide. Its perpetrator suffers exile from the kingdom.

The ground in these parts is not fertile, though it is laboriously tilled. Spade labour alone is employed in the turning of the soil; and at each spade four gangs of a dozen men relieve each other every quarter-of-an-hour. That is, because established ordinances of the state provide that every man in the land may have something to do, and nobody may be allowed to overwork himself. In digging, it is the business of one man to rest the spade upon the ground, holding it by the handle. A second man then grasping it by the middle, steadies it under the blows it receives from the heels of two men, one upon each side. Their duty is to beat its end into the ground. When the spade has in this way been forced four or five inches below the soil, it is the business of a fifth man to bring a rope. This man works very hard, for he not only brings the rope, but also holds it while the sixth man ties it to the bottom of the spade shaft. The six other men of the gang then pull at the rope until the soil is lifted. If, after this, the earth has to be carried to any distance, all the twelve men of the next gang help in moving it, and are allowed an hour's rest after the exertion. All business is done upon the same wise principle, that allows nobody to be without work, and no man's powers to be overstrained.

Joe Bletch held the hammer for a carpenter in Sloley. It was no part of his duty to use the hammer or to hold the nails. The hammer was used by the master carpenter, and Joe's department in the business was to take it from him whenever he had struck a blow, to hold it for him while he rested, and to be ready to give it to him instantly when he felt able to strike again.

The master carpenter was desperately busy. An easy chair had been commanded by his Majesty, and there was much competition in the trade for the production of it; because it was announced that the first chair brought to the palace would be bought, if it proved comfortable. For the last twelve months all the master carpenters and joiners in the kingdom had been toiling each at his own notion of an easy chair of state. But nobody was ready yet. Joe's master, commonly called Old Yesterday, was very forward with his work. This man was called Yesterday from a peculiarity he had of making yesterday's affairs the only subject of his conversation. Every day's business, however little it might interest him at the time, was sure to receive from him on the morrow most deliberate consideration. He always very thoroughly knew what he was about, up to the date of his last bed-time. In other words, being a very prudent man, he never gave his mind to anything till he had slept upon it.

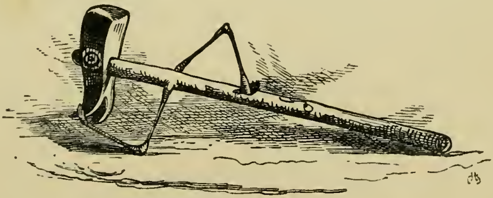
Old Yesterday was very forward with his work; but he had one great difficulty to contend with. A rule of his trade decreed how many blows of the hammer should be given in order to drive each kind of nail home to the head; as six for a tenpenny, two for a tin-tack, and so for others, in accordance with a carefully-adjusted scale. Old Yesterday was not strong in the arms; he rarely drove a tin-tack home at the second blow; and as for the tenpennies, after their six blows they still held up their heads in flat defiance. The carpenter was a marked man, and a ruined man, who should endeavour to improve his work by opposition to the orders of the trade. The public, indeed, suffered. It was certain, also, that the royal person of the King would suffer seriously if he should now venture to sit upon the easy chair that was being constructed for him by his faithful subject. The legs and seat of the chair would tear and wound the corresponding parts of royalty.

Joe Bletch was the most fidgety apprentice in the world. He stood in the dim workshop, with the hammer in his hand, grasping it nervously, twisting it, brandishing it behind his master's back, tapping his toes on the ground, and sometimes, when all the workmen happened to be gone to sleep at the same moment, dancing furiously with the hammer clenched in his hard fist. The light in the workshop was subdued, according to the manner of the country, for the better rest of the workpeople. Old Yesterday, when he had struck his blow, and restored the hammer to Joe's hand, commonly nursed his strength with forty winks. The boy who turned the gimlet had a right to a short nap after every twist. The man who planed wood had a right to sleep as often as he dropped a shaving. A bright light in the workshop would make all such valuable snatches of repose impossible for many. It is for this reason that indoor work in Dulmansland is done as nearly as possible by the degree of light which we obtain in nature when the glare of sunshine is beneficently tempered by a fog.

Old Yesterday sat on a stool in his great workroom, winking before the unfinished easy chair. Of threescore men and boys, each bending over his particular work, some nodded and some snored. Only the boy who had a hole to bore by dinner-time had wakened up to give a fresh turn to his gimlet, and he did not lift up his eyes high enough to see how Joe Bletch, who was never asleep, wrestled behind his master. He was wrestling with the hammer, that was pulling itself out of his hand. For three years he had been grasping it nervously, pouring into it through his fists an eager, straining desire to rush forward, and thump furiously at all the nails in all the boards in all the shops in all the world. During this whole time, perhaps, he had been charging the hammer, as one charges an electric jar, with a tremendous power, and at last it was alive. It pricked up its two ears, lifted its flattened nose, pulled fiercely to get its tail out of Joe Bletch's hand; and, free at length, flew at the nails in the chair to beat them. There was a wild din of rapid hammering that almost roused some of the men. Old Yesterday opened his eyes and stared before him.

"See, master!" cried Joe, "the very hammer can't abide it! Wood and iron hasn't patience with it! It was all right yesterday, so don't you be concerned at what you see. If the hammer is at work in earnest, I'm the man to have it by the tail!" So Joe Bletch leapt forward, got the tail of the hammer in his grasp again, and in ten minutes he had hit every nail on its head, and, at one stroke, driven it straight home.

But each stroke was one too many. Bletch was a lawbreaker in the eyes of his fellow-workmen. They would quit the shop if he remained in it. On the day following, Joe's master reasoned with him upon the excess of which he had been guilty, much regretting that he was compelled to drive him from his service. The account of his wages should be honestly made up, and paid within ten years; in the meantime, as for the hammer, clearly that was bewitched. It could not be retained upon the premises, and he might take it at a valuation, in part payment of what was due to him. Then Joe Bletch went adrift upon the world, to begin life afresh, with nothing but a hammer for his capital.



CHAPTER II.

THE LAD DRAWS HIS KING OUT OF AFFLICTION, AND WILL NOT ALLOW HIM TO BE FED ON LUKEWARM MEAT.

It was at noon, upon a dull September day, that Joseph turned his back for ever on his master's door, and with impatient steps marched swiftly out of Sloley. All hands employed in each of the shops had just turned out to pull together at the heavy work of taking down the shutters. Of the greater number of the private houses, bedroom blinds and curtains were still closely drawn. A few detachments of the brisker sort of servants were occasionally to be seen busy at the cleaning of a door-step: one managing the pail and one the hearthstone, one the mat and one the cloth, three generally standing ready at hand to carry in the pail when all was done. Here and there a sleepy labourer, who had left home before his wife could boil the kettle, was awakening himself at an early breakfast-stall. Joe, as he reached the town gate, stood on one side for ten minutes, while the Stilton mail, drawn by six round horses, came through. It brought passengers from Stilton, the seat of government or capital of Dulmansland, twenty miles distant from Sloley. By this coach came also the Stilton newspapers of the month before last, presently to be delivered at the Sloley breakfast-tables. Newspapers in Stilton appear only as monthly sheets, and usually contain latest news relating to some early period of history.

When the mail had finished travelling in at the gate, Joe Bletch ran out into the open country, and set forth upon the Stilton road at a wild gallop. Weary of restraint, impatient of continual delays, he raced between great ragged hedges gemmed with fog-drops, and the yellow air was wine that set his pulses free. Although the harvest in the fields was partly cut, there was none of it garnered, and the corn might stand. Nothing worse than the fogs was to be dreaded. Anything so exciting as a storm occurs in Dulmansland once in a generation only.

A large party of rustics, carrying a scythe to the morning's work, stopped and looked with round eyes at Joe as he flew by them, opening their mouths as if they wanted only time to utter a cry of astonishment. Beyond them the track turned out of the road into the ditch to avoid some unlopped branch of a tree that barred the passage of all vehicles. Joe, who was flourishing his hammer, struck the branch aside with one blow, and raced on, clearing the path of many a hindrance as he went, until his breath failed, and he was at last content to walk. By three o'clock in the afternoon, he had passed over fifteen of the twenty miles between Sloley and Stilton. Then he came to a farm, in the yard of which fagots were being made into bundles. Out of doors there was nobody at work; within the house the whole establishment was to be seen busy over a great pie. Joe flew at the rough wood with his hammer, broke and tied a pile of fagot-bundles, and then entering the kitchen, pointed to the yard, and said, "I have worked for you, now I am come to eat." All who were at table stared; but the brisk visitor took a plate for himself from the dresser shelf, borrowed the knife and fork which the master of the house had laid down in astonishment, cleared a place for himself opposite the pie, finished it, and drank all that was left in the beer-jug. Then he leapt up from table, and was out of sight before a line of action had occurred to anybody present.

When he had got three miles farther, and was within only a mile of the great city of Stilton, there was a gay crowd under the brown autumn trees that overhung the road. Nothing in the crowd moved, but it seemed to be produced by the stoppage of a great procession. Every bit of it was as brilliant as fog would let it look, except that there were a few countrymen and boys grinning over the hedges on each side. Here, in the road, were the great trumpets, which three men held to the mouths of the four men who relieved each other every five minutes in the exercise of blowing. The trumpeter on duty stopped in the critical turn of a flourish if his time was up, and left it to be finished by his comrade. Here were the great drums, each with the detachment by which it was worked. Here was a tent of state being pitched under the hedge.

"What is the matter?" Joe asked of a staring countryman. "Hee-aw!" was the reply, "It be the King." "The King!" thought Joe. "Am I to see His Gracious Majesty Nodoff the Eleven Thousand and Tenth? I am free. I am loyal. Why might he not take me into service as an active lad, willing to make himself generally useful? There he is!"

In crimson velvet robes, with gold embroidery over green satin body-clothes, with a ball in one hand, a sceptre in the other, and a crown of emeralds upon his head, Nodoff the Eleven Thousand and Tenth, a lean little old man, who looked wretchedly cold and hungry, stood helpless in the middle of the road. He had come out for walking exercise before his dinner. The feet of a King of Dulmansland in walking do not touch the soil, neither are royal muscles left to work without assistance. Each of the King's feet is raised some inches above the ground upon a stage of polished silver. The two stages work together on a hinge between the royal legs, and are pulled forward alternately by groups of men, who keep time to the tread of a drum-major. Now the stoppage was caused by the dropping of a linch-pin. The machinery of one of the King's legs had broken down. His Majesty lay wrecked in the middle of the road. The whole escort was at a stand-still. The tent of state was being raised for the privy council that was summoned to decide on measures to be taken in this great emergency. The order of state to the blacksmith or silversmith by whom the King was to be set up again must pass through several hands. It was feared, indeed, that among the necessary counter-signatures to it was that of a great lord who happened then to be upon the frontiers, four thousand miles away. The difficulty of the position was immense. It was, in fact, a great political crisis. Joe Bletch, quick of wit as of ear, picked up some knowledge of the truth as he pushed through the crowd, and when he reached the King, fell on one knee before him to make dutiful obeisance, saying, "Mercy, O King!" Then rising suddenly, he seized his Majesty by the leg that had cast, so to speak, its silver shoe. Having apparently no more regard for his Sovereign than if he were indeed a horse, the carpenter's lad plied his hammer dexterously, and repaired the broken works. Then kicking aside the escorts, he seized the two ropes in one hand and hurried on. The foremost part of the procession scrambled out of his path as Joe Bletch steamed towards Stilton, tugging the King after him.

A child pulling a toy horse or donkey by a string could not go forward with greater glee or less embarrassment than Joe felt as he drew his Majesty through the main streets of Stilton. Of the streets nothing was visible but a few lights glaring out of house-windows into utter fog.

There is a great building in Stilton of which the dome is one huge globe, and all below is a grand structure, massive as if it had been hewn out of a rock of vast extent, but entered by broad gates of adamant that never have been opened. It is not a true temple, for it is a place of dread rather than worship. They have called it for many centuries the House of the Future, and a Fairy giant is supposed to live in it. If so, he is a giant who keeps close at home. No man had ever seen him, none who listened at the house-gates ever heard a stir within. The building is so vast that in fine weather its tall gates of adamant shine abroad over the housetops into the distant country, and even the fog is streaked by them with a quivering of silver light. The silver gleam is seen below the glare of the great dome, which shines always blood-red through fog and darkness. Joe Bletch had heard of this great house, and now he saw the fog over his head red with the glow of its great dome, but thought little of that. His whole care was to wheel the King up safely to his palace gate.

When he had reached the gate, he patiently rang three times at the palace bell, as he would have rung three times at the bell of any gentleman in his provincial town, where it is law among servants that no bell be answered until after the third ring. He had not allowed for the refinements in a royal house, whereof it was considered shame for any porter to attend to a bell that had been rung less than a dozen times. After the fourth ring, Joe Bletch, observing how the fog hung on the royal whiskers, and the cold painted in blue and red the royal countenance, took out his hammer, and with one stroke on the lock, broke the gate open.

Within there was a long broad flight of lamplighted stairs, on which there were to be seen crowds of footmen dressed in silk and cloth of gold, but there was not one of them who had not a hole in his coat or a rent in his stocking. When these people saw the King, they made obeisance to him, but they did no more. Joe Bletch, seeing that no help was to be had, removed the walking apparatus from the royal feet, hoisted King Nodoff the Eleven Thousand and Tenth upon his shoulders, and so, running upstairs into the palace, carried the monarch pick-a-back into his dining-hall. Dinner was laid. It was three hours past the royal dinner-time, and therefore everything was just ready. Joe was about to put the King in his chair, when he observed that a sharp metal crown which had been one of the ornaments of the chair-back had fallen into the middle of the seat. He took it up before he placed the King upon his cushion, and as he did so, a sigh of happiness escaped the royal breast. A year ago, that crown, which was the uppermost knob of the chair-back, had fallen into the seat of the King's chair. It was an incident which could be dealt with upon no existing precedent. Whose duty it was to pick the crown out of the chair was still a point referred to the state lawyers, and in the meantime the King had been obliged, for the last twelve months, to sit uneasily upon it. The order for an easy chair of state, to be produced as soon as possible, had been a special mandate consequent upon this dangerous position of affairs. Joe did not know what service he had done his King when he picked up the crown and gave a good shake to the chair-cushion before setting his Majesty down at the head of his dinner-table.

The guests and grand officers of state were all left in the road, but a sign of the King's finger to the Knight of the Diamond Ladle, who stood in attendance, set the cooks in action, and the soup had in fact already been during the last hour upon its way from hand to hand, with all solemn formality, towards the royal presence. So perfectly was dinner ready, that even the fish, having been dressed an hour ago, was on its way through the town to the bureau of the Silver Strainer of the Fish Kettles. The soup came as usual before his Majesty in a lukewarm condition, with a film of white fat on the surface.

Then Joe, prostrating himself, kissed the King's foot, and said, "Mercy, O King!" and thereupon, suddenly jumping up, he turned to the Knight of the Diamond Ladle, who stood fast asleep behind the throne, took his great badge of office, which hung by a chain of pearls about his neck, and dipping it into the soup tureen, carried a ladleful of the cold soup towards the fire. There making a warm hole among the coals with the King's sceptre, the best poker he could find, he set the soup simmering among the diamonds, while he toasted upon a gold carving fork a slice of bread, and heated the King's plate. Then he cut into the hot plate the warm toast, poured over it the boiling soup, and took it to the King, whose nostrils were expanded, and whose eyes were watering. King Nodoff, in his eagerness, even made an absurd and ineffectual attempt to feed himself. Joe hung the diamond ladle, something the blacker for the duty it had done, once more about the neck of its Knight, who still was asleep, then tucked a napkin under the King's chin, and fed him carefully, blowing and tasting every spoonful that he gave, in order that the royal mouth might not be burnt, although the royal stomach should be comforted.

It was not etiquette for the King of Dulmansland to speak to an untitled subject. He looked meanings; councils were held for the interpretation of his looks, and the interpretation in a given case having received the sign manual, was reported down from office to office, until it reached an office low enough to give a common answer to a common man. But now King Nodoff, looking at Joe, murmured, "Baron Who?"

"No Baron, Majesty. A turned-off carpenter's boy, Joe Bletch; but you must not choke. Your business just now is to swallow, not to talk."

The King relapsed into silence, finished his soup, and looked resigned again, when six servants, in cloth of silver, entered with the dish of salmon that had been through six government offices since it was taken hot out of the kettle. Then Joe, prostrating himself, kissed the King's foot, said "Mercy, O King!" and thereupon, suddenly jumping up, he flew at the First Lord of the Ruby Gridiron, who was picking his teeth at the stairhead, and tore from his hand the long gold rod, surmounted by the Ruby Gridiron, that was his wand of office. Delicately taking a few cutlets from the side of the salmon, he placed them on the gridiron, turned them carefully, made cunning use of hot pepper and sundry sauces, warmed a plate, and presently was comforting the King with salmon cutlets, hot and savoury, that made his eyes to shine.

"Thank you," the King said, "Baron Bletch."

"Joe, may it please you. I am not a Baron—but don't talk. How can you tell what you are eating if you give your mind to talk?"

The attendants at the table seemed to be surprised. But the position of affairs was so entirely new, that nobody perceived in what way it was possible to interfere. An unsophisticated little page appeared very much to enjoy all these performances, and expressed sympathy enough to induce Joe to trust him with the business of administering to the King a proper quantity of wine. "Keep him happy," said Joe, "till I can be ready for him again." His Majesty, after the first vain effort to feed himself, had resumed his ball and sceptre. The sceptre Joe already had borrowed. He now borrowed the ball. "You don't want it," he said to the King; "and if you like mashed potatoes, it's the very thing to rub them down."

So Joe Bletch rubbed down four or five potatoes with a piece of butter, carefully breaking every lump with the great ball of state, and then put them before the fire to brown, standing a gold dish-cover upon its side to serve as a Dutch-oven. Presently, fixing upon a half-cold haunch of mutton, he cut off three or four choice slices, broiled them delicately, sauced them with hot port wine, and then wound up the royal dinner with a marrow-bone and a Welsh rarebit, while the small page moistened the royal lips with wine. "Mercy, O King!" said he, "the game and puddings were past mending, and the other things I do not understand."

"Baron Bletch," sighed the King, laying his hand gently upon Joe's clasped fingers as he knelt before him, "it is the first hot dinner I have ever eaten." It would not have taken a state council many months to understand the King's looks at that moment.

And at that moment the councillors were at hand. Eighteen rings at the bell had already been heard, the general astonishment of all the servants causing more than usual delay in the attendance.

Joe Bletch, guilty perhaps of high treason, was fingering the hammer in his pocket, and prepared to rush through all impediment if danger threatened. "Remain!" said the King. Joe stood by the King's chair. The grand officers of state began to enter wearily, for they were very tired after the severe exercise they had been taking. They stared vacantly at the rude-looking lad who stood by the side of Nodoff the Eleven Thousand and Tenth, at the golden ball in the potatoe dish, and at the sceptre, which had inadvertently been left to become red-hot in the fire. But the King, laying his right hand upon Joe's shoulder, said to them, "My best friend, Baron Bletch." Knowing then that there stood before them the King's favourite, they all, grand councillors and lord chamberlains, stewards and lacqueys, made obeisance when they heard the Baron's name.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE OF THE FUTURE.

There was nobody in the King's Court who could make head against the Baron Bletch. No office was given to him, but his common title was the King's Right Hand. Everything that hammering could mend, his hammer mended. The King's dinner was always hot, because the Baron cooked and served it. The holes in the royal coat were sewed up in a minute by the Baron's fingers. Everything that the King wanted he could have at once, because the Baron, setting aside the whole train of attendants, himself set off instantly to fetch it. The King took from him private lessons in the art of walking by the use of his own legs, was enticed to be talkative in private, and provoked even to set at defiance, one after another, many of the obstructive forms with which his state had formerly been burdened. The carpenter's lad, raised above his station, taught his Majesty a set of vulgar phrases, which were introduced at Court. The drawling of such exclamations as "Go at it!"—"If it has to be done, do it!"—"Hammer at it!" became fashionable in polite saloons, and were familiar on royal lips, although they represented nothing that was really thought or properly intended to be done.

The crowning incident in Joe's life gave peculiar significance for many years to any phrase drawn from the use of the hammer.

"Mercy, O King!" said the Baron one day when he was alone with Nodoff the Eleven Thousand and Tenth in his own private cabinet; "to serve you truly, I must leave you."

"Never!" the King said. "You have been with me a year. Forsake me now, and I shall die of indigestion."

"By the life of my hammer," said the Baron, "I must go. See how it sets back its ears, two serpent eyes gleam restlessly above its nose. I cannot hold it in."

"What does your hammer want?" the King asked. "Is it starved? How many bags of nails a day will satisfy its appetite?"

"Our longing is," said Joe, "to beat upon the gates of adamant and open the House of the Future. Old prophecies, you know, promise great blessings to your kingdom in the day when those gates open. My arm feels that this hammer will serve for a key to them."

"Humph!" said the King, "you will have to knock a good many times before you will get that door opened. It is something stouter than the palace gate."

"I will beat those gates while I live," said Joe. "I wish to do the utmost for my King and country."

"They never will be opened," the King said; and whimpered as he added, "You will never leave me to such gravy as I had before you came. Care for my soup, if you care nothing for my feelings."

Baron Bletch supposed that he should be able to beat open the gates of adamant in a few days, so strong was his faith in the power of his hammer. It was agreed, however, that—as he might need to achieve the great adventure to which he desired to pledge himself by constant perseverance—three hours in every day, and one of these the dinner-hour, should be reserved for duty at the palace. Joe Bletch would have liked nothing better than to go forth quietly and simply upon his appointed work, and take his own chance of success or failure. But King Nodoff demanded that the work should be inaugurated as a public undertaking, with all due pomp and solemnity. A feast was held, a grand procession was formed, ceremonies were gone through before the massive shining gates, and when Joe struck his first ineffectual blow, drum and trumpet sounded, and a gratulatory ode, written by the Court poet, was sung by the King's minstrels. Then the King ordered it to be proclaimed that Baron Bletch was thenceforth to bear addition to his title, and was to be known by all heralds, through future time, as Baron Bletch, of the Hammer.

When the ceremonies were at an end, many great lords waited with their retinues to see the opening of the great gates of adamant at which the Baron thumped and thundered. Not a splinter came away, not even a spark flew; wet fog thickened. Now and then, visible against the silvery glimmer from the gates, the Baron's magnified arm, wielding a black distorted hammer, surged up and down through the mist. Whether the great lords stayed long to hear the thumping is not known. The fog covered them and made a secret of their movements. For nine years the Baron persevered. His title of honour fell into a word of scorn. Baron Bletch, of the Hammer, who had set out on his work among the trumpetings and the triumphal odes, became the jest of Dulmansland. The King preferred cold soup to his society. The Baron was allowed to occupy a hovel near the gates of the great House of the Future. The lurid globe glared down on him of nights; the fog entered his wretched cell. People who came by, if they noticed him at all, gaped as they might gape at the town idiot; of course, the children mocked at him. Also there was a fair woman who laughed.

She sat upon a great stone at his hovel door, when he first noticed her, wrapped in a thick dress, and shivering in the fog, crooning a ballad, as he thought. So he turned round and said to her, "I am poor. I have nothing for you. Nothing for myself, except this right arm and the hammer." Then he continued knocking at the adamantine gates more stoutly than ever, and it was long before his ear caught foolish words upon the woman's music that were oddly timed in concert with his blows:

"At a rock you knock, and the echoes mock.
Never stock, never lock, by the shock
Is harmed.
By the glamour of the clamour of the hammer
I am charmed."

Joe turned to look at her again. From under the hood of the thick grey cloak there looked a kindly pair of clear blue eyes from the most exquisite face he had ever seen. Golden locks of hair strayed out of their prison in the woollen hood. The broad smooth forehead, busy mouth, and dimpled cheeks had not a trace of care in them, though the nose evidently was a little pinched by cold.

"Who on earth are you?" asked the Baron.

"Nobody on earth," she said. "In Fairy-land handmaiden to the Queen. You will have Oberon down to you if you keep up that knocking."

"Fables!" cried Joe, and turned back to his hammering. When he looked next, the fair damsel was gone; but after this day she often sat and watched him from the stone by his cell-door, teazing him and singing at him. Thus for another seven years he worked on.

When he was most wretched he never slacked in a day's toil with the hammer, although never once had the gate stirred, or a splinter fallen, or a spark been struck. The Fairy at last came to him daily. A great necromancer, she said, had prophesied to her that all work and no play would make Joe a dull boy. So she declared herself his playmate. One morning, surprised by the sun upon his bed of straw, the Baron scrambled up in haste. His playmate, who was on the ground before him, peeped in at the door, singing, not quite so merrily as usual:

"Up we start, and off we dart.
The way to be strong is to labour long.
Flourish your hammer, go on with your clamour;
Thump out your hammer-head, thump out your heart."

Joe's heart really was thumping painfully. "Playmate," he said, "mock me in jest, but not in earnest. Let all the land scorn me; you, playmate, know in your soul that I toil to bless it. Heaven love you for the happy face that has been comforting me with a show of mockery over a truth of sympathy, and—and—you know I love you, playmate; but I must work on. The hammer till death is my fate, and may God pardon my sin if I have chosen ill. Oh, my good little Fairy, pity me, if you can do no better. Anything but a voice of scorn to-day out of the only lips that never spoke to me in scorn before." Joe rubbed his eyes, and grasped his hammer and beat savagely upon the gates. Playmate sat still on her stone, and sang in a low voice that he heard, because he loved it, even through his loudest knocking:—

"Will this hammerer never discover
His need of a morsel of aid?
The touch is light
That doubles might
Over the face of her lover
Light is the breath of a maid."

"What do you mean, playmate, my darling, what do you mean?" cried poor Joe, suddenly stopping in his work.

"I have been scolded for you, my Lord Baron," said the Fairy. "Oberon said he must reason with me when he came in last night to my mistress; and he told me that it was beneath the dignity of a grand Fairy to shiver about for seven years in fog upon earth, while an idea was finding its way through anything so thick as a mortal's head. He was pleased to approve of you, but——"

"You will be more than playmate? helper? wife? all Fairy, as you are; and I, poor toiling idiot," said Joe, "what have I done that I should win such love as yours, when all the glory of your Fairy-land was at your feet?"

"Have I not said that—

"'By the glamour of the clamour of your hammer
I was charmed?'

"If you mortals only loved and cherished play as much as we know how to love and honour work, there would be many marriages between us. So, master, let us content the heart of Oberon. He gave me these two rings, and said, 'If they are not to-night upon the fingers of the Lord of the Hammer and his playmate, visit earth no more.' The air is full of Fairy witnesses. What say you, Baron?

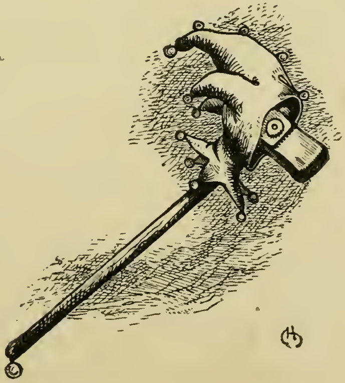
"'With this ring I thee wed—
Merry heart to busy head.'"

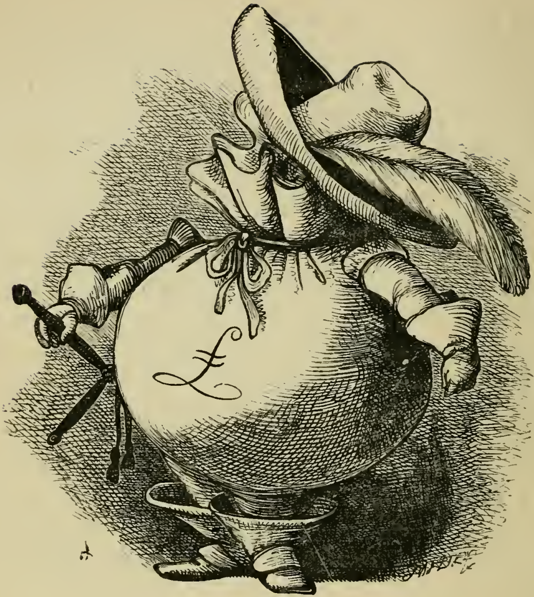
Joe plighted troth by stammering her words after her, and innumerable silver bells took up their jingle. There were low happy sounds about him, and there was a rustling as of wings amidst the fog, but he saw only his playmate, with the ring upon her finger. "Now, husband," she said, "I am strong through you, and you through me. Come to these gates, and let us try their temper once again. Only remember, I am nothing if you do not ply the hammer by my side."

They went together to the adamantine gate. He thundered, and she sang:—

'Jest and earnest, song and clamour,
Working now in fellowship;
The Fairy Wife to the Lord of the Hammer
Opens the gate with a finger-tip."

But when the adamantine doors of the House of the Future were thrown open, the outer throng of Fairies became visible, and within there was seen a vast hall opening into many chambers, lighted by the purest sunshine. Its walls were painted over with innumerable pictures of scenes yet to be enacted upon earth; and in these pictures the figures lived and moved. But all eyes were first upon the mighty figure of the giant who sat in the midst of the hall, covering half its pavement with the sweep of his great robe, burying one hand in the folds over his bosom, and, with arm uplifted, bearing the weight of the vast globe that was the outer dome of the whole building. Of that globe the old, dull red glow broke into rainbows; and then, as if the Hope of the World were re-kindled in it, streamed rays of intense light across the land. The fog was pierced, and rained down in rich odours. Far away in the open country, dead leaves on the autumn trees were green again, and fresh blossoms opened upon the withered stalks of flowers. The townspeople saw that the gate of the House of the Future had at last been opened, and, awakened by the light upon their faces, hurried briskly to the spot. They did not see the Fairies, who were keeping holiday about the newly-married pair. They did not see the Baron. Oberon had laid a hand upon the bridegroom's shoulder, and had whispered to him that he should pass with his bride over the threshold of the Gates of Adamant, and make the house their own.





BRED UPON GOLD.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEAREST PET.

The poorest woman in the land, a long way off, and a long time ago, became the mother of a leathery little bag of a child, that would take nothing into its mouth, and yet remained alive. She discussed the baby's case five hours a day for a twelvemonth with all her gossips. There were ten other children of hers, all with empty stomachs; but then these were hungry stomachs, as became their station. The eleventh child, though it appeared to consist mainly of stomach, opened its mouth, and cried continually, as if wanting food, but instantly rejected everything that was offered.

At last there came by the door an old pedlar, with two feet of beard, and spectacles that gathered the light from the eyes behind them into a couple of burning points, that would set fire to tinder a few inches before his nose, and burn black little holes through anything to which his face came very near.

"That is a curious bag of a child that you have in your arms," he said. "What may you have been wishing for before it came?"

"Just everything, master," said the woman; "then as now. We can buy nothing of you, for we have no money. I used sometimes to get ravenous and half mad through poverty, and long, as a dog for a bone, to bite and crunch and swallow the gold we can never get at all. It's very hard!"

"Very hard to bite such meat?"

"No; very hard to suffer such sore want of meat."

"Ah, dear me!" said the pedlar; "and to have such a costly baby, too, that can be bred only on gold. Will you oblige me with a spoon?"

The poor woman had but a wooden ladle in the house, and this she brought. The pedlar filled its bowl with bright gold pieces, and put it to the baby's lips. The child swallowed them with relish, and then uttered an eager cry for more. The pedlar took the child from its terrified mother, opened his pack, and dipping the ladle into a box of gold coins that was in one corner of it, fed little Pursy with the whole of its contents. Then, for the first time in its life, this infant closed its eyes and slept.

"Sir, sir," said the mother, "what have you done? I told you we were poor. You have put money enough to feed us all for life into the child's stomach. It is gone. What will you do? What can I do?"

"My good woman," said the pedlar, "a kind action is its own reward. I have given your child its first meal, and shown you what is the only sort of spoon-meat it will take. I make your child a present of that little breakfast, and am glad to see that he already looks the better for it. Feed him well, my dear friend, feed him well, and he will be a credit to you all."

"Could you spare his mother, for the other children, one, only one, gold piece?"

"I am sorry to see that I have given the dear baby of yours all, to the last drachm."

The pedlar shouldered his pack, and departed. Presently, the woman's husband came home to his dinner, and there was but half a loaf of bread for all the family.

"There is a fortune of gold in the baby's stomach," she said; and she told her tale.

"I have noticed," said the father, "that when babies have had a full meal they sometimes return part of it unexpectedly. Let us hope it will be so with little Pursy here. Perhaps it would not be a sin to tickle him a little bit, or jolt him into the least morsel of a fit of hiccups."

All was in vain. Little Pursy, who had hitherto been crying day and night, and never, until then, kept anything inside him, now rejoiced in being tickled, crowed when he was shaken, and allowed nothing to drop out of his mouth.

In the evening, when the children of the household were in bed, and even Pursy slept, the parents took counsel together. "We are too poor," they said, "to keep a child that must be bred on gold; but he is our own child, and we must provide for him, if possible." Then it occurred to them that the King's wife was childless, and was a fantastic lady, who attached herself to pets of many kinds. The baby was a curiosity, and would be all the more prized by a Queen for its exceeding costliness. They would take little Pursy to the palace, and endeavour to obtain for him a situation in the Paradise of Pets.

So, in the morning, the poor people put on their best clothes, and taking with them all their eleven children, went to Court. The Queen of that country had a castle of her own outside the gates of the capital, full of objects upon which she lavished much of her affection. There the King visited her constantly and spent his holidays; but as the nation was large, and he transacted personally all his business, his holidays were very short. When Pursy's father and mother arrived at the castle gate and pulled the bell, there was heard from within a loud uproar of barking, mingled with wild screams, that alarmed them very much. The door was opened by a negro boy, two feet high, wearing a loose dress of orange-coloured velvet and a turban of green muslin spangled with gold stars. He grinned, and showed two fine rows of white teeth, as five hundred little spaniels and terriers, all small and very fat, each barking savagely, waddled out to attack the strangers in the legs. They were quieted by a word from the negro, and came in with the poor people and their children, who found entrance easy when they had explained that they came with the present of a new pet to the Queen. The walls of the entrance-hall were entirely lined with bright parrots, macaws, and parroquets, fidgetting and shrieking on their perches. The five hundred dogs, while the visitors stood in waiting, ranged themselves in a circle round them, looking up with expectant eyes and open quickly-panting mouths, brushing the floor all the while with busy tails, as if each dog had reason to believe that meat was to be looked for.

And so it was. The mischievous page had intentionally placed the strangers under the trap-door through which, since it was mid-day, the dinner of the dogs would presently descend. In a few minutes it rained roast meat and potatoes, and the dogs rushed into wild scramble, but the poor little children, upon whom it never until then had rained roast meat, claimed their part of the fattening shower. Even the hungry father picked up a large piece of meat, and was putting it to his mouth, when a pair of heavy hands seemed to descend upon each of his shoulders, and a whiskered head bent forward to snap it from his fingers. It was the friendly and familiar act of a tame tiger; but the poor man roared with alarm when he perceived what paws were on his back.

The page returned, and beckoned to Pursy's father, mother, brothers, and sisters, all bestained as they now were with gravy and potato meal, to follow him. The tiger joined the party; and when they were ascending the steps that led to a first suite of rooms, a pet lamb, chased by a pet terrier, rushed suddenly between the unlucky father's legs, and threw him back upon the nose of the tremendous pet who stalked behind. He heard an angry growl and felt a severe pinch under his coat-tails that hurried him on to the front of the procession.

The first chamber of the suite, spread every morning with clean sand, contained the Queen's falcons; hence they went through wire gates into a room full of humming-birds, which opened upon a delicious garden, and through this garden they were led to a carp-pond, beside which her Majesty reclined, with many fish attendant on the movements of her pretty little hand. Twenty ladies of her Court were about her, each of them with a litter of small kittens in her lap. A steward of her household stood beside her, cap in hand, with a black swan under his arm, that made efforts, not wholly unsuccessful, to peck bits of skin out of his face.

"Tell Belt," said her Majesty, as she dismissed the steward, "that I will keep these six dozen kittens, but he is to send no more, except white ones. Order me, also, another thousand of white mice. I will buy the swan. Take it at once to the Lake, and do not be so rough with it. You see how it is angered."

Her steward having departed, the Queen turned to little Pursy's parents. What had they brought? Then the poor mother told her story and produced her child. The Queen pulled out her purse and put all the gold in it, bit by bit, into little Pursy's mouth. It was taken with much relish, and as the child cried for more when the Queen's pocket was empty, her Majesty bade one of the ladies put the kittens down and go to her treasurer for a fresh hundred of gold pieces. These Pursy ate more easily than any man ever ate oysters. Great was her Majesty's delight. She declared that she should be feeding him all the day long, for oh, he was the dearest pet! And so he was.

The young Queen, whose name was Pearl, desired to buy this baby of its mother, and its father was most willing that it should be sold. But the poor woman declared that it was her own child, and that she could not part with it for ever. She would be most grateful if her Majesty would rear it and be gracious to it, but refused to bargain for its sale. Her only bargain was, that she might not be thought too bold if she came now and then to see how the boy throve.

The boy did thrive. He was a toy costly enough to be worthy of a Queen. Even the Queen Pearl found it necessary to restrict his diet to four meals a day, with an allowance of one hundred gold pieces at each, except his dinner, when he was allowed two hundred and fifty. There was need for Pursy of a mistress with the wealth of a whole kingdom near her hand. For him, Pearl had to reduce also her outlay upon other pets, and the King was not ill-pleased when, after a few years, he found himself lord paramount in his wife's paradise. The wonderful child adopted by her Majesty had in a manner swallowed up all other favourites, and he cost so much that Pearl had always money to beg of the King, and therefore was as a wife continually fond and gracious. Thus the adopted child became a bond of love between his Majesty and her Majesty; and it was but reasonable, therefore, that their Majesties should both treat him with favour.

CHAPTER II.

GOLD AND THE RIGHT.

The royal favour held by him so long that when this pet became a man they made an Earl of him. Very portly he was, and a man of strength in Hungerland. The King of Hungerland, regarding him as his own son, said to him when he was of age, "Earn your own living now, my boy. Earl Pursy I create you, and through you I shall transact all my affairs of state. The labour I impose on you is great. Consider it your business in life; see that you do not neglect it; and remember that by it you have to live."

Evil was the day for Hungerland when this Earl Pursy took the helm of state affairs. Do what he might, men grovelled before him, mere eater of gold that he was—a creature who respected nothing but his own food, and who would estimate whatever man came into his presence by the fatness of his money-bags alone. There were many, indeed, who scorned him; but of those who did so, nearly all were poor.

Chief of Earl Pursy's worshippers was one of the poor, his mother—a thin woman, who now had streaks of silver in her hair, who had become a widow, and who was working, in the midst of all her other children, to maintain with honesty an anxious life. It was a proud thing for her that a son of hers was steersman of the state. She was but one who worshipped from afar. She would not hurt his golden prospects by the thrusting of her sordid figure on the scene.

It happened, however, one day, that a fierce Baron Nehmen took forcible possession of a farm which, by long years of industry, she and her children had acquired. It was not far from the hovel in which Pursy had been born, and it was the only source of food to her whole household. Drury, her eldest daughter, was betrothed to a rich shepherd's son, and being as good as she was pretty, was to marry him, with the consent of his father, when her mother could give her thirty gold pieces as dowry. This sum she had by much privation at length saved, and when her homestead was seized, and she was forced to fly to her old hovel again, the good woman escaped with her daughter's dowry hidden in her bosom.

It was in vain that Drury bade her spend this gold, which was her own, for the relief of pressing wants. "Let me see you married, child," she said, "and I shall have, at least, two children in comfort."

"Then listen to me, mother," said Drury. "If you will not go with me, I shall go by myself to brother Pursy. We have been wickedly wronged, and he has power to right us. Let the Baron Nehmen see to it!"

"Well, my dear," said the mother, "I think that a great statesman, who has so much to carry as my Pursy, ought not to be hindered by his family affairs. He could not do us right without having it said that he judged partially, and wronged one of the great barons to please his mother. What we have done once we can do twice. We earned our way out of this hovel into yonder farm. Why cannot we earn our way again into another farm?"

"And you now getting to be old, mother!" said Drury.

"What then? My children have grown older too, and are now strong, if I am weak. There is more strength than there used to be among us all."

"Good-bye, then, mother," Drury said; "I go alone."

The daughter being wilful, there was no help for it; the mother must be with her to protect her, and the simple soul put on the gayest clothes she had, in which to appear worthily before her noble son. But these poor people tramped to Court on foot. The Baron, when he heard they had set out, galloped on horseback thither, waving his cap to them gaily as he passed them on the road.

So the Baron arrived first, and when he came to audience of Earl Pursy, found him closeted with a foreign physician then at the Court of Hungerland.

This was an old man, with a large beard, who was robed in an ample suit of the white foxes' skins. His eyes shone with so much power through his spectacles, that their rays met in a couple of burning points, a few inches before his nose. The Earl's physician withdrew to the recess of a window when the Baron entered.

The Baron Nehmen's suit was ended quickly. A woman would come with a complaint that he had seized her farm. He brought assurance of his innocence, he said; and placed two hundred gold pieces upon a table. He could testify on oath that he had bought this farm. The Earl lay sick upon a couch, and, with a re-assuring word, dismissed the Baron.

"I warn you not to devour that," said the physician, pointing to the gold, as the door closed. "Your life was saved by the stab from which you are recovering. If you were not surrounded by men thirsting for your blood, who lie in wait—not always in vain—to hack and hew at you, you would long since have died of repletion. You owe life to the daggers and the hatchets of assassins, who are bent on giving you the bleedings that you will not take from your physician."

"A man who bleeds doubloons may dread the lancet," replied Pursy, as he ate a handful of the Baron's coins.

"Beware, Lord Pursy," the physician said. "You live till you have passed your utmost stretch. By frequent and free bleeding only is your life to be maintained. You have, since your last wound, been living richly here at home. That bag of gold may be the meal that kills you."

"We will see, doctor, we will see," he said.

In ten minutes he had devoured all the gold, and rose from his couch, panting a little, to put on the cap in which he carried his great feather, and to buckle his sword to his side. Strutting stiffly and uneasily about the room, he bade the doctor note that he had life in him still.

Some days later the footsore mother reached town, with her best clothes travel-stained, and leaning on the plump arm of her daughter Drury. When they came to the Earl's door they were refused entrance. "Say," said Drury, to the dismay of her mother, "that his lordship's eldest sister and his mother wait his leisure in the hall." An old gentleman in spectacles, who wore a robe of the white foxes' skins, passed at that moment down the stairs.

"Pedlar!" cried the poor woman.

The physician smiled at her, and said, "I am come to conduct you to your son. I have good eyes, and saw that you were coming."

"You are my boy's friend?"

"Do not doubt me. I am interested in your son. The magic books, in which I study the great wonders of nature, have made of the wide sky a looking-glass, in which I see reflected clearly all that happens under it. When your boy was resisting your attempts to give him ordinary human nursing, it pleased me to exercise my art on studies of his nature. To so great a curiosity I was, of course, attracted, and my interest in him is deep. I hang over him but as a student of the fields hangs over a rare herb."

"As you will, as you will, sir. Is he well?"

"His life," said the physician, "is in peril. He will not moderate his appetite. His body is now overloaded with crude gold. Whenever a fresh coin goes to his mouth 1 tremble for him."

"Poor dear!" said the mother. "Glutton!" said the sister. But they both begged to be taken to him.

When they were introduced by the physician, Pursy stood erect, and, with a jaunty air that was a little fierce, demanded who those people were. When he was told, he answered proudly that he was Queen Pearl's adopted son, and knew no other mother than the Queen.

"For shame, sir," said his sister Drury; but the mother broke upon her speech with praises of Queen Pearl. "How good she was to you! But now she has a child of her own——"

"A common, puling brat, not ten months old!" cried the Earl, angrily. "Do you bid me fear it?"

"Fear it, bless your heart, dear!" said the poor woman. "Of course it is the darling joy of all the Court. Only I think now the good Queen will not grudge a bit of your heart to your mother."

The Earl held his fat sides and gasped.

"Help him, dear doctor!" said the woman.

"Nonsense!" said Drury. "It is nothing but a spasm of pride or jealousy at the poor little Crown Prince. Lord Pursy, I do not claim to be your sister, but I ask you, as the man of power in the state, to compel a robber to make restitution of a widow's house that he has swallowed up." Then she told the Earl by what base violence and open wrong his mother had been driven back in poverty to her old hovel.

"What have you to show in support of your petition?"

"Send to the spot and hear the evidence of all our neighbours."

"Is that all?"

"Confront us with the Baron. Send for him."

"He has already deposited in Court two hundred gold pieces. Do you plead with empty pockets?"

"Alas! my dear boy," said the mother, "I have saved nothing out of the wreck except the thirty gold pieces that are your sister Drury's little dowry. But I hear that you receive too much. All this rich food may be the death of you, my child."

"That is well," sneered the Earl. "Go on. My food is my poison, certainly."

"Come away, mother," Drury said; "do you wait for your son to spit upon you? Gold is the food of us all, Earl Pursy, but death waits at the table of the glutton. Wise men do not accuse gold. It is to them a stepping-stone, and only to the fool a burden."

"Little wise as you are, Mistress Drury," said the Earl, "it is not a weight under which you are likely to be crushed."

Then he knocked upon his table, and a page came who was sent to call his secretary. His mother knew that he was about to have an order written for the restoration of their property. But when his secretary came, Earl Pursy said, "See that these women are confined in prison for a fortnight before they are sent back to the place from which they came."

CHAPTER III.

THE DEATH OF THE LORD PURSY.

The Earl's enemies went, therefore, to Queen Pearl as she sat with the heir-apparent crowing in her lap, and told her how her favourite had sent his mother and his sister to a gaol when they came pleading to him for justice against a strong oppressor. Her Majesty had at that time a very high sense of a mother's dignity, and was already become weary of the complaints laid against her costly friend. She therefore caused the two women to be secretly brought into her presence. Then having heard very plain truth told by the younger of them, having been touched also by the natural and honest ebullition of the elder woman upon coming into presence of the Royal Baby, which declared itself much pleased with her behaviour, Pearl persuaded the King utterly to disgrace their favourite.

The whole Court exulted at Earl Pursy's sudden fall. His mother and sister, released by the King's command, were sent home with a troop of the King's soldiers, who had orders to execute a royal warrant against Baron Nehmen. They took with them, also, partly as a prisoner, the discarded favourite, who was sent back to the home from which he had been taken.

Their Majesties declared that the Earl Pursy was to be thenceforward his mother's slave. She was to have rights of life and death over him. Because he had spurned her, he should be her chattel. What foolish rights were they to give to one who was the simplest and the tenderest of women! She had forgiven her son's cruelty before the prison door was fairly locked upon her. When she was set free and heard the royal mandate, she feared much that her own company would be unwelcome to her son, but had agreed to take him back to her, lest hurt should come to him among his enemies. The cost of his keep would, for some time, be nothing, as the physician had assured her that his hope of long life lay in a complete starvation for the next few years.

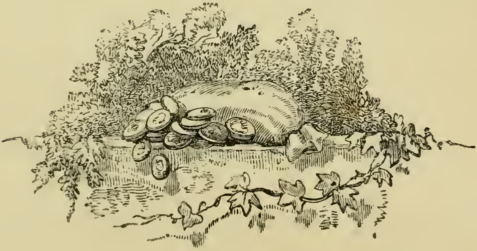
Pursy, deprived not only of his earldom, but even of the feather in his cap and of his sword, sulked boorishly during the journey. When they arrived at the family hovel in which they were to sleep for only one night more, because the farm was to be theirs again next day, Pursy laid himself down in a corner with a sullen face and shut his eyes. The mother sobbed, and was not to be comforted, until her thoughts were diverted by the arrival of the shepherd's son, who came to welcome Drury back. The whisperings of the lovers were a pleasant music by which her sore heart was comforted again.

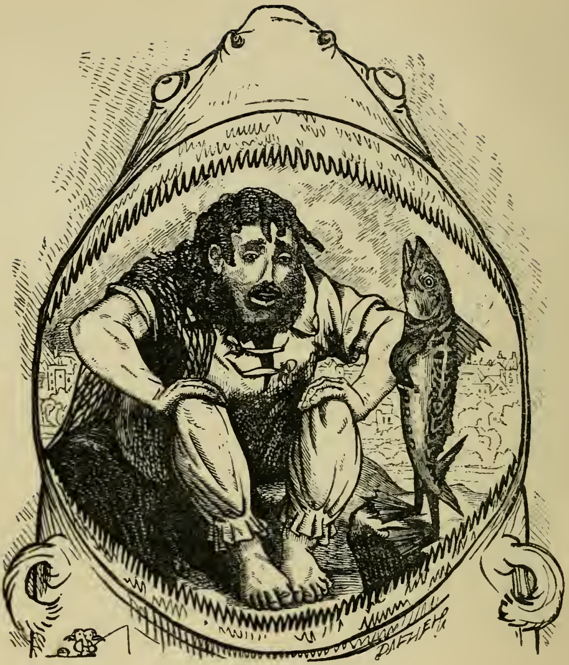
When the moon was high, the shepherd lad went to his own home, and Drury went up carolling to her small chamber. The other sons and daughters had retired already; and the widow, with a tender parting look at her disgraced son, who had wrapped his cloak about him, and lay still upon the floor, went to her prayers.

But when the moon was higher, Pursy was alone afoot within the house. With stealthy tread he passed from shelf to cupboard. There was gold under the roof, he knew. The thirty pieces laid by for his sister's dowry never had been touched. At last he touched them.

As he did so, the bright eyes of his physician, who, unable to conquer curiosity about the creature that it was his whim to study, had been following the troop from Court, shone through the lattice.

The physician uttered a weird cry when Pursy thrust the gold into his mouth. For he choked as he swallowed it, and falling from the shelf to which he had climbed, burst like a rotten money-bag into a heap of gold, that glistened like red wet blood in the moonlight.





THE LETTERED MACKEREL.

CHAPTER I.

THE MACKEREL DISCOVERS SOMETHING IN HIS LINE.

It is not every fish that knows how to give a dancing-party. The Mackerel does not dance; he sings, and enjoys music of every sort except a catch. Therefore he does not attend the fancy balls of my Lord Shark, which are so fine that they throw all the sea into commotion.

My Lord Shark fattens upon hospitality. He asks his meat to dine with him; introduces affably the Whale to the Shrimp, and the Pike to the Gudgeon; heads the revels jovially, and sends everybody home, who does get home, so full of the good things of the sea, that the tide rolls with his praises. Some there are who do not get home, but they cannot complain.

Once upon a time, my Lord Shark gave one of his fancy balls. The fishes, in preparing themselves for the revel, had used up everything they could find in their masquerade store, and were still only half dressed. Gale and Whirlwind, therefore, were commissioned to send down many more ship-loads of frippery. The said firm, which drives a roaring trade, busied itself to such good purpose for its customers the fishes, that this one particular ball was the grandest ever given under water.

The small fry that were permitted to look on made walls and roof to the great dining-hall. Kept in square, head over head, by a detachment of Sword-fishes, glittering eyes and golden noses of seven hundred and seven million million of Pilchards formed the lofty walls. Those eyes and noses belonged only to fortunate possessors of front places in the great mob eager to see the feast. Many of the distinguished guests liked to eat bits of the wall as much as any other delicacy offered for refreshment; but holes made by their nibbling were filled up instantly by the exulting outsiders, for whom front places were thus procured. The roof of the ball-room was a floating cloud of those small beings which sometimes appear as fire upon the surface of the wave. It was a joke of the Whale's every ten minutes to break from the dance into the outer sea, and then come tumbling back into the ball-room through the roof, with his great mouth open, swallowing the candles; for the myriads in the roof served also as candles at the feast they covered in. I know no more than that, in some such fashion, a whole palace was made for the occasion, of rooms scooped out of the crowd of little fishes, miles broad and miles deep, that thronged to see the fun. Except what he had of Gale and Whirlwind, who are well-known purveyors of meat to the fishes, besides being establishers of the great frippery store under the sea, my Lord Shark's feast came with the crowd that admired it, and the guests who were to entertain each other.

The costume worn at this fancy ball displayed numberless treasures of the deep. Lord Shark had made himself a chain of state from the skeleton hands of good men lost in a December tempest. He had wrapped himself in a gay coat, that was the three-coloured flag of their wrecked vessel; but as it did not keep him comfortable, he thought of enlarging it before his next ball with some patches bitten out of other flags. My Lord had covered his tail with an odd red cap, much dirtied, and had wriggled till his nose was set fast in a gilt brass crown, which had in some way fallen among the fishes. Being nearly stifled by this, he was obliged to gasp so much that his teeth were constantly on view. Still my Lord Shark he was, and the feast was his. Two Cuttlefish, who had covered themselves with more slime than belonged to them by nature, flaunted in goose feather. These creatures waited near my Lord's jaws, and whenever they saw that he was preparing for a snap, darkened the water round about him with their ink. For the Shark—to inspire confidence among his guests—declared that he ate nothing, and wished none to see him fixing his teeth in his prey. A circle of Sprats surrounded this great creature, for he was glad when he looked at them to know how great he was. There were some Sprats who had been present at the breaking of a barrel of pitch, and being stained—for the pitch stuck—of the colour of Whales, they believed themselves to be a sort of Whale, and as they swam, half split themselves with struggling to blow waterspouts out of their noses.

Distinguished among the company there was the Crab, who kept a stall or grotto of men's bones, and who had filled his grotto with old nails and chips of wood, crosses and whips, and chains and curiosities in bottles. He had a sceptre from the broken figure-head of an old war-vessel fastened to one of his fore-legs, and this he trailed behind him in the mud as he crawled round and round his stall, in anything but a straightforward way, begging of every fish who seemed to be of consequence that he would please to remember the grotto. A free kind of Sword-fish fell into a passion with this Crab, ran at him, and turned him over on his back, at the same time knocking his grotto down. Then there came swimming through the holes they made in an old three-crowned hat, files of Sardines, who ran away with the clog on the Crab's leg, and so left the poor creature free to scramble quickly out of sight.

But the Mackerel saw none of the gaiety and had part in none of the Shark's feast. He stayed at home for a good many different-sized reasons, and one great reason—that he was too busy. For years he had devoted his whole mind to a question of magic. He had been occupied intensely with the study of that mysterious line which, till this day, wit of man or fish never availed to decipher—the line written in strange letters on the Mackerel's back. Clearly these are the varied letters of some words of mystery. In a strange language writing is traced on the back of the Mackerel, and it is even underlined in evidence of its importance. Now, it happened that our Mackerel, who had been studying his own back for a hundred years in a glass borrowed from a Mermaid, read the first letter of the magic line at a time when the revel of the Shark's great fancy ball was shaking all the water round his cave. And in the moment when he knew what was the interpretation of the first letter, his tail-fins grew into legs having feet each with a thousand toes, and his gill-fins stretched themselves into arms having hands each with a thousand fingers. Music had been his sole refreshment in the intervals of work. A good-natured Siren used to bring her harp and sing with him. Sometimes, when she meant soon to come back, her harp had been left in a corner of his cave. There it was at that moment, ready to be touched, and the exulting Mackerel, taking it between his feet, swept his two thousand fingers through its many strings. Then music, such as no ten-fingered creature ever made, brought all the Sirens to his door. A magnificent Cod-fish, rolling by on his way to the fancy ball, pushed through the Sirens, and looking in as he passed, said, "Not bad for a Mackerel!" But all the little Pilchards, who, like the Herrings, have music in their hearts, ran to the wonderful harper when the sound of his song reached them. Off and away went, therefore, the walls of the ball-room. After the walls ran the guests, till, in a little while, there remained only, in open water, my Lord Shark and his black Sprats. My Lord, for want of better meat, snapped at these creatures, made a wry face as he crunched them, and then spat them out. For Sprat and pitch sauce disagreed even with him.

CHAPTER II.

MORE IN THE SAME LINE.

Although there may be more fish in the sea than ever came out of it, there never was another fish so bold as the Mackerel, who, popping his head above water, hailed a fishing-boat to carry him to shore. "Is it a Mackerel?" thought to himself Filarete, the fisherman. "Can a Mackerel hold up a long arm, stretch a finger, and cry, 'Boat, ahoy?'" Of course this fisherman did not know how this fish was studying his letters with advantage to himself. The first letter he learned gave him a thousand fingers and a thousand toes. The interpretation of the second letter on his back having now flashed upon him, he was able to speak in a thousand tongues. As most fishes are mute, the greater number of these tongues were those of men, and beasts, and birds. "My talents are drowned in the sea," said Mackerel; "I care not for a fishy reputation. Why have my tail-fins become legs, except that I may walk upon the land? To the land I will go, being on fire to extend through earth and air the fame that has already circled through the water." So, as he meant, nevertheless, to go on studying his back, he tucked under his arm the Mermaid's glass, bought for a song. He took also his new thousand-stringed harp. It was made for him by the Sirens, of hair from their own tresses, stretched over the shell of that crawling thing of the deep which once put the chiefs of men into its purple livery.

The Mackerel was looking for a boat to carry him over the surf to the shore, when he hailed the young fisherman Filarete with "Boat, ahoy!"

"What do you want? What are you?"

"I am the famous Doctor Mackerel Pescadillo, linguist and composer. Take me over the breakers. I have business ashore." As he spoke, Doctor Pescadillo reached the side of the fishing-boat, and putting up an arm, seized, with a many-fingered hand, the boatman's oar, and jumped in cleverly.

"Legs too," said Filarete; "and you stand upright! Business ashore! I think you have." Then he entangled him in eight or ten folds of his fishing-net. "You and I will have business together, my fine fish." And he began to amuse himself, as he pulled eagerly to land, with crying, "Walk up! all alive!" already fancying himself the prince of showmen. "All alive; the Mackerel is now upon his legs, and speaking. Now's your time! Be quick; for the miracle of nature is engaged to marry the Randan of the

Pacific Ocean's Grandmother, and is going off directly in a fly!" While he spoke, the boat occupied his attention, for he was backing her across the breakers. Away darted the Mackerel when she was safely beached, and scampered singing up the shingle.

With a thousand fingers upon each hand, knots are very soon unpicked. Pescadillo had not only unpicked himself a way out of the net, but had unpicked every knot in the whole mesh; so that when he leapt out of the boat, Filarete's nets were become a litter of loose string. The Mackerel ran faster than a swallow flies, and yet the fisherman gave chase; for the mischievous fish, instead of running out of sight, often sat down or lay down, feigning sleep, and never started off again until the hand, stretched out to seize him, was within a scale's breadth of his body. For he was resolved that Filarete should be his follower.

They ran till dusk, when they got to the top of a mountain, which they had been climbing all the afternoon; for it had pleased the fish to try his friend's wind to the utmost. On the mountain-top were ragged points of granite, but the central peak was a smooth table on which twenty men could stand. The Mackerel then slipped into a hole under a peak, while the fisherman, distrusting his feet, sat down to use his eyes. He was too hungry to sleep, and watched well until morning, when he observed, where he had lost sight of the Mackerel, a gleam as of water in a cranny of the rock. He had been drenched in the mists of evening, and had seen the moon half the night through. He had heard odd music after sunset, as if a thousand or two of tiny fingers had been harping. The ridiculous Mackerel had sung also sentimental songs about the stars.

Then, as dawn approached, when the poor fisherman was shivering with cold and hunger, the Mackerel, still full of sentiment, as he was empty of all other meat, was heard singing:—

"Now like the tender hope of fish, the doubtful morning breaks,
Scarce venturing to thrust a beam upon the sullen flakes
That stretch across the East, as though they gathered there to bar
The passage of the coursers of the sun's triumphal car."

"Tooraloral la!" said the fisherman, "but I will venture a thrust on your flakes with something handier than a beam, my good friend." The Mackerel was at the bottom of a deep cleft in the rock, where he could not be reached by his friend's arm, and he had turned his hole into a fountain of sentiment, because that was the most nauseous thing he could produce for the vexation of his adversary. But Filarete saw a bush growing near the Mackerel's retreat, and felt that he could produce what would be more stirring than any nonsense verses. He tore off, therefore, a long straight bough, rapidly stripped it into a small pole, and began savagely to thrust at Doctor Pescadillo. As he did so, he found that the gleam from the cleft was not of water, but of looking-glass, in which the Mackerel seemed to have been admiring himself while he sang. The glass he smashed, but the owner of it ran up his stick almost into his hand, leapt over his head, and, with his music-shell tucked under one of his arms, had climbed the sharpest pinnacle of rock before the fisherman turned round to look for him. The Mermaid's glass was broken when he had almost made out the third letter of his line.

"Well," said Filarete, "I'll starve you out, though I can no more catch you up there than I can reach yonder mackerel sky."

Mackerel sky! Pescadillo stretched his legs and spread his arms, and gazed up at the clouds that wrote his line over and over again on shadowy mackerel backs far overhead. His eyeballs started forward; he stood on the tips of his two thousand toes, and spread abroad into the air two thousand fingers, as if they were about to clutch; then read aloud with a low voice, at which the mountain quaked, the third of the letters in his mystic line.

In the same instant a thousand dishes of choice food smoked on the table of the mountain-top. Close to the right hand of Pescadillo there was floating in the air the meat he liked best, in a shining dish. Filarete's favourite dish came also to his hand. "Now let us breakfast," said the Mackerel. Filarete was already breakfasting. Fish and fisherman stood where they were; the right thing came always at the right time from the table to the hand of each. When they had both eaten enough, the breakfast vanished; but the fisherman said to the fish, "My lord, I am your servant. While you can command such a table as that, I know how great and good you are, and I will follow you about the world."

"I take you, man, into my service," said the gracious Mackerel. "Now tell me what is yonder city by the lake? There is the sea behind us, and the mountain-peaks are to the right and left. I am not for the sea or for the mountains. I shall go down into that city—what is it?"

"The city, my Lord Doctor Pescadillo, is the city of Picon, by the Lake Picuda. It is there I sold my—may I say in your worshipful presence—fish. The way from the sea is by yonder ravine. The lake is always bubbling, and produces only bubbles. Little corn or fruit will grow on the plains, and these wild mountains, as you see, are barren. The people of the city live, therefore, almost entirely on what we poor fellows get out of the sea. They seldom have enough to eat; but you will feed them. Not in your own worshipful person, no. Yet you run risk until they find out what sort of a fish you are."

"There is a king there, I hope," said the Mackerel.

"My lord, there are a hundred kings, each with ten daughters. The country, being barren, is so hard to govern, that it takes a hundred kings to make anything of it."

"Very good," said the Mackerel. "I will go down to those kings and offer marriage to their thousand daughters."

CHAPTER III.

THE LAST OF HIS LINE.

The principles upon which Doctor Pescadillo had established his first happy attempts to read the writing on his back having helped him to three letters, enabled him thereafter to make quick and easy progress in research. When he and his Squire reached the landward foot of the mountains, they were hungry again; but the Mackerel had only to repeat the discovered third letter upon his back, and a new feast of a thousand dishes smoked upon the ground before them. Still, also the slightest freak of appetite in master and man was so well studied, that each had under his hand exactly what he wanted, at the moment when the notion of it came into his head. When they had eaten, being foöt-weary with yesterday's race and the morning's scramble down the mountain's side, and, furthermore, lazy with fulness of meat, the wayfarers lay down on their backs and looked up at the sky, wishing for a coach to come and carry them into the city. There was still Mackerel enough overhead to engage the attention of the Doctor. Was it possible that thus, when half asleep, he seized the true reading of two letters at once? The tremendous possibility caused him to leap to his feet. He tried one of them—the fourth of his line—and instantly a thousand horses, harnessed to a chariot, galloped by. They halted when the chariot was abreast of Mackerel and man. Their mouths were free; there were no reins to guide them; and it was noticeable that when any of the magic coursers put their heads to the dry ground and opened their mouths, corn or hay ran up between their teeth, and little water springs welled up where they were thirsty. "The other letter," thought the Doctor, "must be right since this is right; but as I get what I want by the thousand for each letter, and don't yet know anything more that I want, let me keep it by me for a little while."

It is in common kindness to be expected that the person to whom this story is told should be told also what is the sound of the letters, that, when spoken, will produce at once a dinner, or an equipage on this liberal scale. But the letters are those of a dead language that was never living among ordinary men, and known only to a most ancient race of sorcerers, whose mouths were like the mouths of fishes. The last survivor of that race—a thousand thousand years ago—upon the day of his death caught a Mackerel, the only kind of fish having a mouth exactly fit for the pronouncing of his language. In dark letters he wrote with his finger on the fish's back a line of power as he died. The letters of this line, and of course also the line itself, only the mouth of a Mackerel can utter. It is for that reason that they cannot be told in the story.

Pescadillo understood already a thousand tongues, among which tongues of horses were included. He learnt therefore, at once, from conversation with his stud, that he might trust them to do as he wished; and by addressing them all clearly in their own language before starting upon any journey, he afterwards knew how to save himself all trouble of explanation when upon the road. As they galloped into the city of Picon by the Lake Picuda, there was a commotion on the pavement, and a rush of bright eyes to the windows. The two eyes of a lovely Princess looked out of each of the ten windows of each of the hundred royal palaces. As horse after horse galloped by in the same traces, and still no coach, but still more harnessed horses followed, first there was a cry of joy for horse-riders, because clearly this was the troop of a grand circus entering the town. Then, as there came by still horses and horses, the people cried there were too many horses, for the land did not yield corn to feed them, and even if these riders brought so much corn with them, they should give it to the people, who were hungry. At last, when the streets were full of the horses, there appeared the chariot they drew, and in it was a common fisherman, with a small fish. "Yah!" cried the mob. "Do you want all those horses," cried the kings in chorus, "to bring only one fish to market?"

The Mackerel endeavoured with his harp and song to still the uproar, but in vain. There was no help for it; he spoke his reserved fifth letter, and cried "Silence!" There fell instantly upon the town a stillness as of night in the great desert when no wind stirs. Not even the rasp of a breath or the scrape of a foot was heard, though men seemed to be raving, shouting, and stamping quite as much as before. Now, therefore, the wonderful music was to be heard, and by it a few women were soothed.

The horses, being at rest, began to feed heartily upon the corn they got out of the stones on the road, and a rush was made to their mouths. But the wise Doctor spoke his third letter, and there appeared the thousand dishes of hot meat, dancing about without hands to carry them, and thrusting themselves, ready carved, under everybody's hand. While the people fed—every one getting the dinner he liked best—the Mackerel played music, and hoped within himself that the same letter by which he had enforced silence would have power to unloose from its own spell. It had. By uttering that letter, the most fortunate of fishes could stop any sound at will, and let it go again when he thought proper.

A creature that could give such dinners had his own way entirely in the city and land of Picon. The hundred kings deposed themselves for love of him, declared him sole king, and themselves his viceroys. He changed the next letter he read into a thousand palaces of wonders, and in each there was a study, walled with looking-glass, so that he worked with comfort at the writing on his back. Every new letter he learnt to utter crowned with thousandfold fulfilment the wish of the hour. The thousand Princesses vied for his love; but he began to see that he could not be happy with a thousand wives. His last letter, except the very last, he gave to the wish that the one thousand dear Princesses could be all rolled into one.

Then there was a sight to be seen! Royal Princesses tumbling out of windows and doors, rolling about the streets like balls, every two that came together lost in one another, till the thousand had all rolled together into one colossal damsel. Her the poor little fish was very proud to marry. He did not think himself small, and yet, being small, a large wife was entirely to his fancy. Even in common life we see the shrimps of men marrying whales of women. This couple was married in great state—the fisherman being groomsman to the Mackerel, and all her hundred fathers standing by to give away the bride.

The wedding ball was so magnificent beyond belief that King Pescadillo, in his brilliant court, surrounded by his hundred kingly fathers-in-law, could not help thinking of the old days under water, where so much was thought of the Shark's ball, and when the friends of his youth laughed at him for staying at home to learn his letters. As he thought this, he looked at himself in the great mirrors on the wall. There was the one last letter nearest to his legs. His flush of triumph so quickened his wit that he could read it at a glance, and whispered it unconsciously while he was wishing my Lord Shark were there to see what a state ball Lord Mackerel was giving. He looked up, and saw the ball-room walled with glass, behind which were a thousand sharks in sea-water glaring upon the company. The company was in extreme delight at this clever addition to its entertainment.

Then the little Mackerel's heart beat with exultation. "Something," he said to himself, "I know not what, is near. This is my wedding-day, and on this day of all days I have finished reading the inscription on my back, letter by letter. If the power of the single letters be so great as to fulfil wish after wish, and tempt me on till I learn all, now that I know all, what will be the strength of the whole charm!"

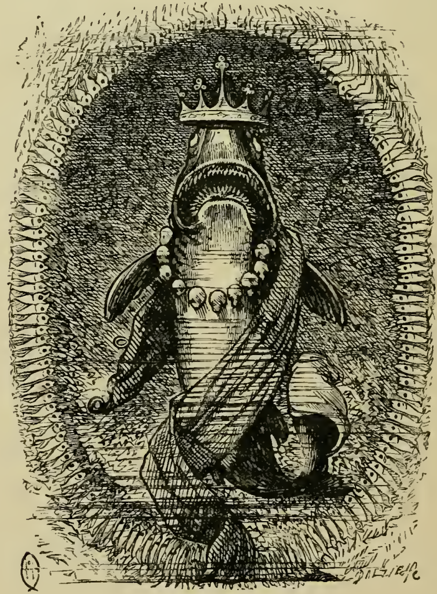
Ah, cunning sorcerer, last of your line, you fellow who died a thousand thousand years ago, and on your last day wrote upon a fish's back the word that would give you life again when it was spoken, you had reason for being liberal in your rewards to the fish that would spell out that word for you!

The Royal Pescadillo stood upon the stool before his throne, and spoke the letter that compelled strict silence. Then, with panting sides, dread at the great unknown issue of his adventure tempering his triumph, he gasped out the entire magic word; and at the word the giant sorcerer, with a great hairy face, of which the beard trailed behind his feet, entered the ball-room door. This might be right, thought Pescadillo, though his little knees knocked at each other, and the thousand fingers of each hand twitched nervously. The cruel sorcerer advanced to the poor little fish, seized him, and thrust him into his great mouth as the first morsel to be eaten in his second course of life.

The first and last. He should not have been cruel. With his two thousand little fingers Pescadillo fastened to the hair about the monster's lip, and as he hung there he dug with his two thousand little toes into the monster's throat, so that he could not bite; he could do nothing but cough and choke. And the wise Mackerel held tight. He would not be coughed up, though he was almost blown off his legs by the tremendous coughing. All the company had run away; nobody had stayed to see how the brave little Mackerel fought out his battle in the sorcerer's mouth, till the great wretch, in a fit of choking, tripped over his own beard, reeled heavily against the glass walls, and broke through into the tank where all the Sharks were swimming.

The Sharks soon finished the battle, and with a large sorcerer to eat had no eyes for the little morsel of a Mackerel, who seized his opportunity to slip away, and ran back with the stream of water to the sea from which it had been raised by magic channels.

And so Mackerel got safely home again. In all his life he never read another line, and he warned all his relations to get through their lives as merrily as they were able, without ever inquiring what they carried on their backs. "Not for thousands," he said, "would he himself have been so curious had he known everything when he began his studies!"



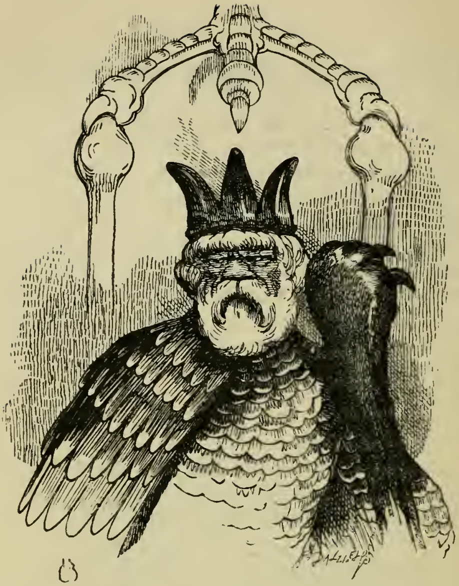
A Rhyme of Might and Right.

Pride parted them. They were immortal born,
Twin children of Eternity. Their bond
Of strength was in their brotherhood. But scorn
Of an associate too meek and fond
Left the soft sister in a glen, forlorn,
To sing, and hope—for Truth cannot despond—
When Dynamis, departing from her side,
Went forth by despots to be deified.

At birth to her this deathless attribute
Of constancy the great Creator gave.
When her twin brother in the bold pursuit
Of action suffered, she was made to save;—
She to exist, and he to execute
Heaven's will beneath her guidance. Ever brave,
But often building up the cause of wrong,
Only Alethe made his building strong.

With even pace, and ever slowly, moved
The maiden, constant to her forward way;
While Dynamis with rapid impulse roved,
And often from his sister's path would stray.
Him found fatigued, she lovingly reproved,
And, while he slept, upon the road would stay
To watch his slumber, and with song and kiss
To bring refreshment to her Dynamis.

His strength of hand, to aid her strength of heart,
Alethe needed in her wandering,
Nor ever could she from one spot depart
Unless with her that brother she might bring,
But, waiting till he should from sleep upstart,
Beneath the night her music she would sing.
Where he deserted her she would remain,
Hoping, until he came to her again.



TIGERSCLAW.

Craggy and barren dales, through which only fine threads of water came, entangled among stones; dry mountain-sides jagged with the broken lines of dried-up water-courses; crags of basalt and granite overhanging deep ravines; sharp mountain ridges and fantastic peaks, were the chief features of the land over which Tigersclaw was ruler. He was the Prince of a barbaric race of men, and had his Court in a great palace hewn out of a mountain. In his boyhood, when his father reigned, a tiger had leapt down upon him, and had been seized by him with naked hands and arms.

The beast was vanquished in that wrestle, and the boy returned triumphant to his father's Court, carrying a fore-leg of the dead tiger, wrenched out of its socket at the shoulder-joint. The tiger's leg, straightened and dried, with claws outspread, became thenceforth the war-club of the Prince. It was alike terrible as his war-club and as his sceptre, when he became the only master of his nation.

The men subject to Tigersclaw were, like himself, fiercer and more stalwart than men of other races; they were keen-eyed, hook-nosed, and largely bearded. Their long black hair, coarse and straight, fell across backs and shoulders covered with the skins of beasts of prey, in which alone these warriors clothed themselves. No man might wear a skin that he had not stripped from a beast of his own slaying He who could not master a leopard would chase the wild cat. But they ranked highest in the state whose loins were furry with the skins of lions, tigers, or, chief dignity of all, were plated with impenetrable dragon-scales.

That was an honour won by few. If dragons were not very rare, all life but their own would wither in the pestilence they breathe out of their nostrils. Tigersclaw, having slain one dragon, had journeyed into a fair land to destroy another, and thereby assure to himself his rank in his own kingdom. Of the livid scales of the first dragon, shining still by their own baleful light, there had been made for his huge limbs the armour that he never put aside; and over this he carried, when at home, a robe and train made of the blood-red plumage of the other dragon. It had been a feathered monster, with a bristly head. Over his torrent of rough hair he wore a three-fanged dragon's tooth as helm or crown, and went armed with no other weapon than his club. His palace was a single hall, scooped, ages before his birth, out of the substance of the greatest mountain in the land. The skins gathered by his ancestors during a thousand centuries, and many of them falling into dust, tapestried the vast walls only as high as a club could strike. Above this all was crag, that rose till it was lost in the darkness of the empty vault. An ancient settle, raised upon a bank of earth, backed by the largest skins, and marked by a canopy of jutting granite, was the King's hereditary throne. Grated gates, concealed by the tapestry behind the throne, led up a score or two of steps hewn in a rock gallery to the dungeons, with which all the rest of the great rock was honey-combed. The thickness of the walls about that hall of state was everywhere pierced with dungeons, having rat-holes to admit the outer air and light. The enemies of Tigersclaw went to the wall when they became his prisoners. They and their jailors, in their cells and corridors, served as a contrivance for producing warm air, let into the stone of the barbarian's mountain palace.

Tigersclaw sat after sunset frowning on his throne in the great hall of state, surrounded by his thousand captains. His black eyes glared over his beard, his dragon-scales gleamed from his arms and legs, the lurid coils of his red dragon-robe lay on the mound behind him, ghastly to see. Battle with him would be as horrible as battle with the dragon that he almost seemed to be. The captains were about him, many of them mounted upon camels, stirring their large hairy arms from under spotted skins, and looking wilder when they drew over their own wild black hair a lion's mane, upon a hide clasped to their backs by the two fore-feet joined about the throat. Their eyes were bloodshot and their gestures fierce. A troop of plunderers, some upon camels, few upon horses, many on foot, entered the hall to produce their prey. There were a dozen prisoners, and some heads of cattle, with but little grain or other wealth, for the surrounding countries had already been devastated far and wide by Tigersclaw's wild hordes, eager to find abroad the riches that had been denied to their own land. The men of this troop panted, and their eyes also were bloodshot.

"Ho!" roared Tigersclaw. "When you were sent to find water, do you bring me only slaves and oxen?"

"My lord," said a wild fellow on a dromedary, "we found water."

"Your water-skins are empty," thundered the King, clutching his club. "You mock; you die."

"Stay, my lord," said the chief of the band, putting a young woman forward. "This is the culprit."

Tigersclaw lightened when he saw her in her loose blue robe and her fair flowing locks, standing forward from among his wild men, frail and fearless.

"Ha!" he said. "You are to be my prisoner! Tell me her crime."

"We found," said the captain, "a full fresh stream in a glade beyond the frontier, and when we went to fill our skins, this girl was bathing in it. So we haled her out, and it may be she was beaten. When we went to get our water the stream had run dry. What is she but a curser of the water-springs?"

"You do not flinch, girl. Is this true?" the King asked, fiercely.

"True, to the best of his knowledge," said the prisoner.

"You seem not to be made of trembling stuff."

"Yes I am, rather."

"Your name?"

"Rill."

At a sign from Tigersclaw, the girl was led round his chair. He seized his club and scowled at her as she passed it smiling; but she followed her grim guides into one of the cells beyond the grating. The King then drank from a small tank of water in the middle of the hall; each captain drank as much as could be lifted in the hollow of his hand before retiring from the audience, and the common soldiers went thirsty as they came.

Then Tigersclaw, wrathful at the slippery trick she had played his men, piqued by her mocking air, and somewhat attracted by the sparkle of her beauty, went up to the dungeon of his captive Rill.

"At last," said Rill, "you wait upon me."

"Yes," answered the Dragon King. "I and my club."

"Well said, my friend. You and your club. I will find good use for your club."

"That I find ready to my hand," said Tigersclaw, furiously swinging his great weapon and aiming a death-stroke at the head of his prisoner. The club, as it struck, only splashed water on the wall.

"Now," said Rill, "you have knocked on the head the best chance of a comfortable life that ever came in the way of a king of tiger-skinners. Out of my path, I am going."

Tigersclaw did step back as the floor of his cell suddenly melted into water under Rill's feet, and the water rising, poured down into his great hall. The maid passed out lightly on its surface, and the King—eager to drink, eager to strike again—partly pursued, partly was driven in pursuit, by the descending torrent. The waters rose in the hall, eddied among his ancestral tapestries, and swept every skin from the walls. As he was lifted from his feet, and clung for support to the canopy above the royal settle, that sacred chair began to dance upon the whirlpool pouring down behind it, and dashed forward in mid-current. Upon this Rill leapt, and swiftly rode upon it. The royal skins danced in its wake, bobbing up and down in the great swirl of water like a shoal of porpoises. So they sped beyond the gates of the mountain, with a roar and a rush through the dale, and down, at last, through a dark yawning hole, to the abysses of the earth. All the water that had risen, following the same course, ran away, and was lost in the same unfathomable gulf, that was as a great well suddenly struck open by the force of nature. Not a drop of all the water that had rinsed his palace remained anywhere to comfort Tigersclaw or any of his subjects.

For a week Tigersclaw raged with an ungovernable fury. He caused rocks and stones to be hurled continually down the gulf into which Rill had disappeared. But this was thirsty work. The few streams that had been trickling in his land dried up. Tigersclaw fell into madness, and when he had ceased throwing stones, he suddenly cast himself also, club in hand, into the well.

Through the water at the bottom, by which the shock of his fall was broken, he descended into a cell that resembled one of his own palace dungeons vastly enlarged, and having water in the place of stone for walls and roof. But it was nearly filled with the huge heap of all the stones that had been cast down by his orders. The dive through the water, of which, in his passage, not a little found its way into his stomach, and soaked through the pores of his dry skin, refreshed and soothed the tyrant, whom thirst had been torturing. He sat upon the heap of stones, rejoicing at the moisture that was on him, in him, and about him, when Rill entered.

"Again," she said, "you and your club. Well?"

"Prisoner Rill," said Tigersclaw, "that water seems to have washed something out of me. You are no longer my prisoner, and I am yours."

"This," said Rill, "is the particular well, at the bottom of which Truth lies. It is generally known that Truth lies at the bottom of a well, and many wells have been searched, in hope that one of them might prove to be THE well, into which it is your good fortune to have jumped."

"I have been a fool," said the grim King. "Drown me, Rill."

"First, let me hear why you think yourself a fool."

"I have been feeding prisoners, when we had not enough of food and water for ourselves."

"So you would kill your prisoners if you got back into your palace?"

"I would set them free, give them fair, honest words at parting, and recover, through them, some of the rich neighbours I have lost."

"That you might be able to plunder them again?"

"That we might exchange help with each other. Drown me, Rill. I had a fool's pride in my strength."

"And now you scorn it?"

"No, I do not. Now I feel that it was the root of peace, from which I tortured but a sickly growth of war. Rill, when I look at you, I think you mean it to be well with me. You flooded my palace. You can let the water-courses loose over my land. And let me also loose."

"As for you," said the Fairy, "look to this mountain of stones hurled down upon me in a six days' shower. I shall send you up again to your own people. If you really do dismiss your prisoners, as you have said, then you will only have to carry all those stones out of the well again with your own hands in order to secure my help."

"You mock," said Tigersclaw. "Woe's me! That is a work of thirty years."

"With industry, it can be achieved, I think, in twenty. Many a nobler man than Tigersclaw has laboured all his life in work that seemed to be as fruitless, and has longed in vain to see before he died his hope achieved, in the unsealing of the water-springs for which he thirsted. But I have pity on you, who were pitiless; my easy terms shall be made easier. While you submit faithfully, and toil for the well-being of your country, one brook, at least, shall always flow for the refreshment of its people."

Very potent, indeed, was the water of the well; and Tigersclaw submitted to the Fairy. Having been lifted to the well's edge by a rising spring, he went directly to his palace, and dismissed, with friendly words, his prisoners of war. Then, slinging a large pouch over his dragon-scales before him and behind him, he became as a bucket that descended and ascended fifty times a day, bringing back from the bottom of the well, at each ascent, as large a burden of stones as his brawny limbs could bear. A rill, that grew into a river, wound its way across his land, and begot herbage on its banks. While his tiger club rested against a stone by the well's mouth, for twenty years the rough King laboured daily in the well of Truth, and brought up stones. But the last load of stones was followed by a spring that floated up the royal settle, and a wet heap of the skins of beasts.

"There is your throne again," the Fairy said, "and all your tapestry. You may chop that up to enrich the fields, for which you will, in the next place, have to pay me homage."

"Homage, what homage?"

"When you and your club waited on me," answered Rill, "I promised to find good use for your club. Every year, in the spring-time, the first acre of ground that is sown shall solemnly be raked with that claw by the King's own hands, in the presence of the chief men of the state. By that homage you, and those who shall come after you upon this settle, hold what you receive of me. Is it agreed?"

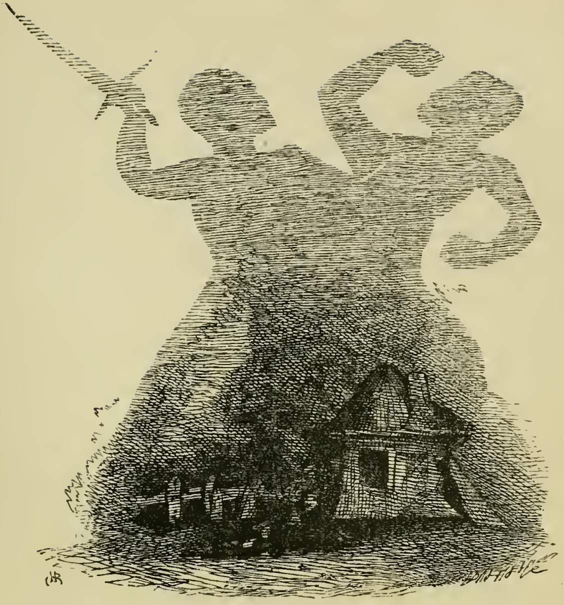
"Fairy, you are my counsellor," said Tigersclaw.

"Then go up to the summit of your mountain palace, and assemble there your captains."

The King did so. From that lofty peak there was a wide prospect of dry, stony mountain-sides, crags of basalt overhanging waterless ravines, fantastic peaks, and the one green dale through which flowed the Fairy river given to the warriors of the wilderness. The afternoon sun in a sultry sky scorched the King's cheek; while, even upon the peaks, or in the barren hollows, there was not a breath of wind astir. Presently, a sound was beneath the King's feet, as of plash of sea in summer-time within a cavern. The open dungeons were all flooded, and out of the rat-holes, by which light and air had entered them, water poured down over the surface of the mountain. Then, far and near, the twisted torrents sparkled in the sun, as they leapt from the height of stony precipices. A deluge beat down heavily from a black rock that overhung the stony valley, near the palace gates. It roused the echoes with its booming, and the mist that was about its chaos filled the air below the King's feet with a rainbow glory. Then, as far as eye could reach, the whole of the wild country was seen covered with a silver network of broad rills. Everywhere the hearts of the wild hunters leapt when they heard in their deserts the bubbling, and the rippling, and the gurgling of the running streams.

By this gift, of course, the face of nature became changed. The grizzly and now venerable King, when the first grain had been sown on watered ground, solemnly raked an acre of soil with his tiger's claw. His subjects, little used to arts of peace, made huge clubs with clawed ends, after the model of that used by their chief. These were for centuries the only rakes or harrows used upon that land.

Tigersclaw died, and was buried by a running stream. Kings who succeeded him governed a strong-limbed, peaceful race, brawny with toil, and rich in all its produce. Neighbours multiplied, and lived with it in friendly commerce, till a distant predatory chief heard how this race, once terrible in war, was at last wholly occupied with its own industry, and had made even a clod-crusher of the historic Tigersclaw. Then a fierce horde advanced on what was thought to be an undefended land. But, at a word, every man's rake became his club, and, in a month, the land of peace held every invader crushed among its clods.



DROPPED FROM THE CLOUDS.

Far in the West there is a land, mountainous and bright of hue, wherein the rivers run with liquid light; the soil is all of yellow gold; the grass and foliage are of resplendent crimson; where the atmosphere is partly of a soft green tint, and partly azure. Sometimes, on summer evenings, we see this land; and then, because our ignorance must refer all things that we see to something that we know, we say it is a mass of clouds made beautiful by sunset colours. We account for it meteorologically, while the very children know that this glorious land is a world inhabited by Fairies.

Few among Fairies take more interest in man's affairs than those flighty Cloud-Country people.

Hundreds of years ago there were great revels held one evening in the palace of King Cumulus, the monarch of the western country. Cirrha, the daughter of the King, was to elect her future husband from a multitude of suitors. Cirrha was a maiden, delicate and pure, with a skin white as unfallen snow; but colder than the snow her heart had seemed to all who sought for her affections. When Cirrha floated gracefully and slowly through her father's hall, many a little cloud would start up presently to tread where she had trodden. The winds also pursued her; and even men looked forth admiringly whenever she stepped forth into their sky. To be sure, they called her Mackerel and Cat's Tail, just as they called her father Ball of Cotton; for the race of man is a coarse race, and calling bad names appears to be a great part of its business here below. Before the revels were concluded the King ordered a quiet little wind to run among the guests, and bid them all come close to him and to his daughter. Then he spoke to them as follows:—

"Worthy friends! there are among you many suitors to my daughter Cirrha, who is pledged this evening to choose a husband. She bids me tell you that she loves you all; but, since it is desirable that this, our Royal House, be strengthened by a fit alliance with some foreign power, she has resolved to take as husband one of those guests who have come hither from the principality of Nimbus." Now, Nimbus is that country, not seldom visible from some parts of our earth, which we have called the Rain Cloud. "The subjects of the Prince of Nimbus," Cumulus continued, "are a dark race, it is true, but they are famed for their beneficence."

Two winds, at this point, raised between themselves a great disturbance, so that there arose a universal cry that somebody should turn them out. With much trouble they were driven out from the assembly; thereupon, quite mad with jealousy and disappointment, they went howling off to sea, where they played pool-billiards with a fleet of ships, and so forgot their sorrow.

King Cumulus resumed his speech; and the purport of what else he had to say was, that his daughter meant to marry the first Knight who would accomplish an adventure for her sake. Two noble fellows, with black floating pennons, Nebulus and Nubis, instantly came forward. Then said Cirrha, "The first who have offered shall be first to go. Look down upon earth at yonder youth, who sits in a desert, with his head between his hands. He has been gazing up at us for the last hour. They call him Nicotine, and he is hopelessly in love with Princess Bascarilla. From my height in the sky I have often seen him sit all day long moping in the desert. Now go—both go—and I belong to him who first makes that youth husband to his idol."

Disconsolate Nicotine had fled the world, and lived upon sand, in a small hermitage no bigger than a kennel. To gaze at the clouds while longing for his Bascarilla was the only occupation left to him in life. He was sitting on the sand outside his kennel, worshipping the gorgeous colours in the clouds about the setting sun, sighing and dreaming. When he saw the wilful little winds rush out to sea, it occurred to him that they were prophesying change of weather, and "Alas!" he said, "no wind blows change into the settled gloom of my unhappy life. Upon my head no blessed rain descends!" But as he spoke, he was laid prostrate by a cataract. Nebulus and Nubis both came down upon him, fighting and spitting fire at one another by the way, each eager to be first upon the ground. Nicotine, sopped to the skin, lifted his head from the ground into the thickest and the wettest fog that ever choked a throat. But the fog parted into the shape of a couple of swarthy-looking people, who both bowed to him and begged a thousand pardons for having dropped upon him with so little ceremony.

"Is the Princess Bascarilla well?" asked Nebulus; but Nubis then spat fire and dug an elbow into his friend's rib, upon which there was instantly a great rumbling inside him. Nicotine answered nothing. He well knew himself to be the sport of all the elements. Wet and forlorn, he fled into his hovel and made fast the door against his friends. Moreover that, in spite of bolts and bars, they might not still break in, he stopped up all the holes there were in walls and roof, with gloves, coats, waistcoats, handkerchiefs, and stockings. Nebulus and Nubis waited outside in the form of settled mist, and the youth dwelt in darkness, feeding upon dreams of love.

But by day and night the quarrelling of his two friends kept up a din about the doors. They elbowed each other, thundering and spitting lightnings, till they set fire to the thatch and burnt the poor boy's roof over his head. But at a beck from Cirrha, who was watching their behaviour from a summer sky, the two clouds, like huge, black birds, spread their wings wide and flew up, fighting as they rose. Then Nicotine saw that although the hermitage was burnt, the ground about it, because of the dew in which it had so long been bathed, was changed into a delicious garden.

Far over his head, Cirrha was admonishing her knights, and telling them that since they would not serve together peacefully, they must needs serve in turn. A day should be appointed for a tournament in the blue fields above. The victor in the tournament should have the first chance of her hand, by going first to the relief of the disconsolate young mortal.

What marvel there was in the land when it was known that the youth, who had been so long under a cloud, was the owner of a Paradise of fruits and flowers! All the world raised the dust of the desert on its march to Nicotine's Oasis.

Oranges there ripened with the apple; there were figs, and peaches, and pomegranates. There were cactuses, and there was even a great aloe in full blossom; there were roses, and lilies, and daffidowndillies, of which all who came might gather, Nicotine cared not. The garden was inexhaustible. He was the Prince of Gardeners, said the whole world. But he only sat in the charred ruin of the kennel, which the growth of ivy had changed into the most picturesque of garden ornaments. He seldom spoke, but if he spoke at all he scolded. Was the Prince of Gardeners a rank that entitled him to wed the high-born Princess Bascarilla?

She also came to walk among his flowers and to taste his fruit. She dressed and behaved according to the perfect fashion of her day, and to pay a visit to Nicotine's Oasis was a duty that society imposed upon her. The youth opened his eyes when, surrounded by ten thousand small black pages, every one ringing a peal of silver bells, and followed by an innumerable flock of Italian greyhounds, she also came to pick his roses and to enrich her lips with the ripe juices of his fruits. When she came into his garden, he opened his eyes wide, and until she left, not even when she stood for half an hour to look at him, his round eyes never winked. He heard her praise him as she would have praised an owl. How could he startle her by crying, "Bascarilla, be my own?"

Then came the ladies in waiting, chattering among themselves about a great battle then impending, upon the issue of which hung the fate of King Binchona's crown and kingdom. Though King Binchona was the father of the Princess, these ladies chattered about his threatened overthrow as if they were but chattering about the weather. Very soon, indeed, it was about the weather only that they chattered. For into a ring that had been forming in the sky, there rushed from opposite sides two angry rain-clouds, thundering against each other. There was a frightful battle up above, blood poured like rain, or rain like blood, and the maids of honour scampered away to their palfreys, and their litters, and their coaches. There was a procession of them ten miles long, but when the last woman had followed in its rear, the battle in the sky was raging still. At last there was a pause in strife, a stir among the masses of the clouds. Presently a mighty wind whistled by Nicotine, and the dark Cloud-giant Nebulus stood in his garden. "I have fought and am the vanquisher," he said. "Command me, man. I can be, do, or suffer anything to serve you."

"You have vanquished in the sky," said the youth, suddenly inspired, "conquer on earth. I am desperate; I know not who you are or what you want with me. Destroy me if you must, but if you will, as you say, be anything or do anything to serve me, then be a War-horse and carry me to the battle which decides the fate of King Binchona. Barb my spear with your lightnings, clothe my right arm with your thunder."

"Right!" said the Cloud. "My mistress bids me help you to wed Bascarilla; her praises have resounded through the sky, and we all know that she is daughter to Binchona. It is well. I am a war-horse."

He was a black war-horse, with dripping sides, and flashing eyes, and steaming nostrils. Swift as the wind he carried reckless Nicotine across the desert. Scenting it from afar, he bore down on the strife that was already begun. They met the flying troops of King Binchona. The youth caught a lance that was hurled after them, and thundered down on the pursuing enemy. Electrical was the effect of his voice. Every man's hair stood upright when he raised his war-cry, "Ho, for Bascarilla!" Convulsed with terror, the whole army of the enemy fell flat, every man with his face upon the ground, while Nicotine, upon his steaming war-horse, sat in the midst of the vanquished, brandishing his spear. The army of the King having returned, picked up and bound the prisoners. The number of them was nine hundred thousand seven hundred and three. Not a man escaped. Then singing martial songs, the conquerors marched home, with their deliverer, towards the capital.

But there the populace, delirious with joy, rang all their bells until they cracked them, and played all their fiddles until there was not left one foot of whole catgut in the city. On his magnificent horse, glorified still with the terror of its thunder, Nicotine rode through the streets, hardly seeing the crowds at the windows through the upcast caps, and hearing nothing where the air, for a mile high, was choked with sound.

Into the grand square before the palace the King and his daughter, in their best array—he crusty with jewels, and she gay with flowers—came forward to greet Nicotine as the Sword of his Country. When the hero reached the centre of the square—a noble youth, in simple herdsman's dress, with lightning glances, and an arm that seemed to wield the thunders of Olympus—her heart leapt, and she whispered to her father, "Let him be my own." The sun of fortune shone as brightly over Nicotine as the sun that was glowing in a dark-blue sky, flecked only by a single cat's-tail cloudlet; but, alas, for him! that cloudlet was Cirrha.

Cirrha was cold of heart, and not yet minded to become the wife of Nebulus. When, therefore, she saw that he was on the point of accomplishing the adventure by which she was to be won, she played him a cat's trick. While Nicotine gazed at a Princess on earth, Nebulus, equally in love, pranced under him, rearing his head to gaze up at his Princess in the sky. Suddenly, Cirrha smiled at him, and beckoned. She was irresistible, and knew it. In an instant, therefore, up the deluded Cloud went—horse no longer—in the form of a waterspout, carrying Nicotine with him, rolling up head over heels, in the very moment when his cup of happiness was at his lips. So he was dropped into a great bramble-bush outside the town.

"It is a great enchanter who has helped us," said the King.

"Woe's me!" said Bascarilla. "He has carried off my heart."

Nicotine lay for some time dripping in the bramble-bush, and did not see how his friend Nebulus sailed off to the north-east in dudgeon, when he found his mistress only laughing at the ease with which he had been duped. Nubis came forward instantly to take his turn as an adventurer. "Daughter of Ball of Cotton, I am warned," said Nubis. "You will endeavour, no doubt, to cheat me also."

"Oh, yes," said Cirrha; "I am bound in honour to attempt it. Nebulus might well chide if I did not."

"Nebulus chide," said the jealous Cloud, looking his cloudiest. "No matter; I will win you, mistress. See that you hold by your word."

Cirrha looked at him coldly, and bade him begone. What right had he to doubt the good faith of an Empyrean Princess?

Nubis, rightly believing that the youth would feel a little sore, stole on him gently in his bramble-bush, in the form of a light evening mist. Then taking the shape of a cloud figure, through which moonlight shone, he said, "Sure help I bring you, Nicotine. Remember how I fought on your behalf against the traitor Nebulus. I knew him able to achieve only disasters. Let me take you from among the brambles."

"Off! Touch me not," said Nicotine. "This bramble-bush henceforth shall be my bed. Here I will undergo a life-long penance for my trust in vapour. Friendship, earth, life, hope, everything is vapour. You are as solid as the solidest; but I will none of you."

The vapour passed into the figure of a young and handsome maiden, in a cloud of soft, white muslin robes.

"Hear reason, Nicotine," it said. "To bring about your marriage, I shall do better to deal as a woman with the Princess than as a man with you, for you are troublesome and foolish. I shall go now to the palace, and attend upon the person of your Bascarilla as her waiting-maid. I will obtain her confidence, win her to you, and cause you to be brought to town in triumph again; not with the procession of an army, but among young maidens who strew roses before you, through streets hung with lace and garlanded with orange-blossom, while there shall be new bells in all the churches to ring for your wedding. Go back to your hermitage and there await me. When the moon is again full, I shall come to you there, and bring a summons in the first love-letter from the Princess Bascarilla." Having said these words, Nubis floated as a wreath of mist over the city walls, and passed into the chamber of the Princess through the window, which in summer nights was always open.

Bascarilla slept and did not awake until morning, when she saw a new lady of the bedchamber sitting beside her pillow, dressed in many folds of the most exquisite white muslin, weeping silently. "Who are you?" she asked.

"Suffer me," answered Nubis, "to attend on one who is beloved by the lord of all my fortunes."

"What lord?"

"Nicotine! Let me serve you, that I may serve him. He loves you and he lives." The tears rained down the dark cheeks of the new handmaid, and, during the whole month of her residence within the palace, water poured out at her eyes.

"Who are you?" again asked the Princess. "Are you highborn?"

"Very. Of as high descent as any upon earth. And yet I serve you. If you will call me sister Nubis, I will call you sister Nubilis, which means, I think, ready for marriage."

Nicotine crawled back to his garden, and sat there in the old den, looking out for a full moon. Nubis won sisterly confidence from Nubilis, who sought in vain to dry her eyes.

"I think it odd," said Nubilis one day to Nubis, "that you always wear clean muslin dresses and yet brought no wardrobe with you, spend all your days with me and send no clothes whatever to the wash. Do you get up your fine linen by moonlight? Confess, dear; you are a Fairy, are you not? Enemy, of course, to the wicked enchanter who carried Nicotine off in a waterspout."

"His enemy for ever!" said Nubis, fiercely, and with the flash of her eyes then burnt a hole in the Princess's bodice. Bascarilla screamed, for the fire touched her side. The King came to the rescue; but the Princess, taking her friend's hand, said, "I always felt it, now I feel more acutely than ever, that this is no common person, royal father. I demand of her my hero."

"What does the King say?" Nubis asked.

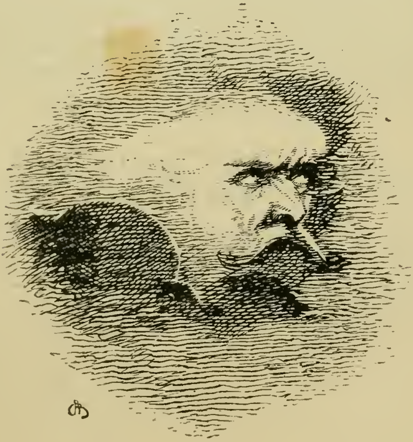
"Let me be sure that it is he. Let him enter again on his black war-horse to claim Bascarilla, and I will have the bells restored in all the steeples to ring wedding peals for him. With my daughter's hand he shall have for his slaves all the prisoners he lately took, to the number of nine hundred thousand seven hundred and three, and the reversion of my kingdoms."

"It shall be so," said Nubis. "On the eve of the full moon, let me receive a letter from the Princess Bascarilla calling Nicotine, Sword of the Kingdom, to her side, and on the night of the full moon he shall receive it. For the day following get ready your bells, prepare your festival. On his black war-horse Nicotine again shall thunder in your streets."

On the eve of the full moon, Bascarilla Nubilis indited a delightful letter, calling Nicotine to shelter her for ever in his arms. Then Nubis, indeed a Fairy, put the letter in her bosom, spread her muslin skirts, and floating out of window, passed as a light mist over the city walls. Malicious Cirrha beckoned pleasantly to Nebulus, who sulked in the north-eastern corner of the sky, and the poor, heavy, credulous, brave Cloud was at her side again, this time to be received with smiles and tempted to endearment.

Nubis, floating towards the desert, saw the false-hearted Cirrha dancing by his rival's side, and instantly becoming black as night, exploded in a flash of wrath that set the love-letter on fire as he rushed up to separate the lovers; but he found his mistress only laughing at the ease with which he had been duped. And to this day she is cold as an icicle, a maiden Princess among summer clouds.

In the great city a feast was made, but only the cooks ate it. Nicotine sat in his ivy-tod waiting for fortune, more especially expectant at the seasons of full moon, but his desire never was satisfied.



DICK AND DOLL.

Dick and Doll were the best friends till they married. Then,

"I will go east," said Dick.

"I will go west," said Doll.

"And we will never see each other more!"

"And we will never see each other more!"

So Dick, going to the uttermost East, was half wrecked in the sea, and was half baked on the land, half eaten by the insects, and half stripped of all he had, before he got into a desert at his journey's end.

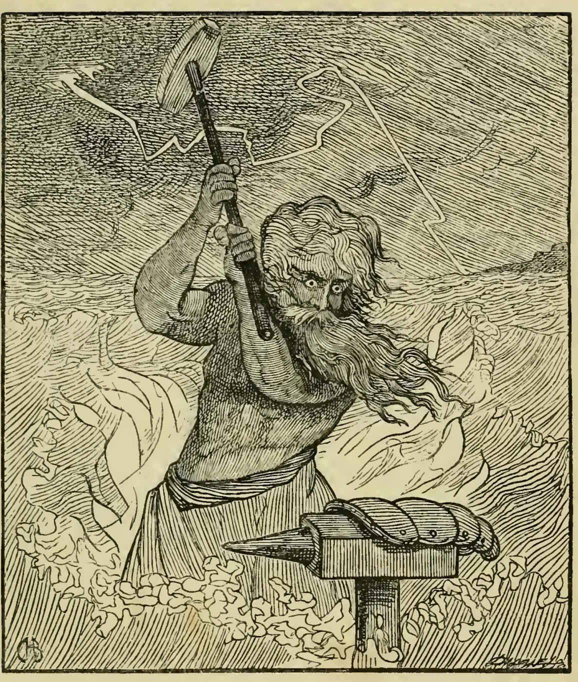
And Doll, going to the uttermost West, went to the bottom of the sea, but floated up, to be wounded on land with a hundred arrows, to be stripped of all but the rags left her in charity, and to walk the skin off her feet in getting to the desert at her journey's end. There she saw, in the twilight of the wilderness, a man limping towards her. They both limped on till they came together, and stood face to face.

"What, Dick!" said Doll. "Is it thou, man? Then it seems that the big round world is not to part us."

"It seems not," said Dick; "and so what say you, Doll? I think we may as well go home together."

"To part from each other never more!"

"To part from each other never more!"



ELAN THE ARMOURER.

Where no ship is sailing, and no bird is flying, far away from all land, the great waves mingle their foam with the low, scudding clouds. Sea and air break in storm against each other. The lightning leaps over the rolling hills of water; over the falling hill-tops the wind hisses and the thunder-crash descends; but the hills fall to rise as mountains, and the mountains rise to be dashed through the sky in powder by the fierce stroke of the gale. The roar of the beaten water, and the hiss of the foam swept by the hurricane into the upper sky, are as a whisper to the thunder-peals that crack as if the globe itself were being rent in twain.

There is a red gleam tossing between heaven and earth. It cannot be a ship's light, for no ship could live in such a gale. The lightning flashes into it; the thunder rattles over it. The water beats it up into the battling clouds, and leaves it to fall back into the depths; but the hills of the sea do not cover it. Out of the lowest abyss it mounts again, and grows as a fire. It is a floating forge-fire, and a mighty anvil rides beside it, upon which a giant beats. The giant's calm face and his yellow hair, dragged by the wind, are ruddy in the blaze of his own furnace. The flame of the forge flickers on his naked arm as, when it is raised, the hammer-head plunges among the thunder-clouds before it falls upon the armour he is shaping. That is Elan who rides the Waters, terrible in strength.

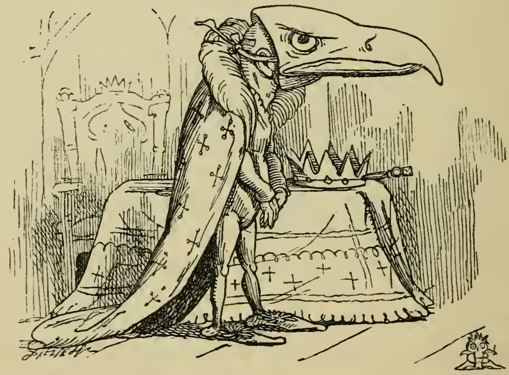
Of his strength the sea-nymphs are enamoured. In calm weather they play about his forge, and delight more in the ring of his hammer through the vault of heaven than in softest music of the sirens.

From afar over the waves, the sound of the hammer could be heard on the shores of the kingdom of Cockpaidle, when there was a clear sea and no speck on the horizon. Sometimes at night, watchmen upon some coast cliff of Cockpaidle saw, like the gleam of a distant lighthouse, the moving forge-fire of Elan of the Waters twinkle between sky and ocean. Then the watchmen lighted their own signal fires upon the hill-top, and height after height was tipped with flame as the quick signal passed. Armed knights and cross-bow men then crowded the Cockpaidle war-galleys. The rowers strained their arms, obedient to the whip that urged them; for they were in no haste of their own to come within reach of the giant's hammer. Every King Pipit, down to Pipit the Twenty-ninth-and-a-third, who ruled at the time of which this story tells (there had been ninety-one kings of the name, but many had their tenths and their thirds reckoned as fractions, so that Pipit the Eleventh had been held to mean, not the Eleventh King Pipit, but Pipit the Eleventh of a king)—every Pipit had laboured to make Elan his prisoner. For there was an ancient prophecy, boding destruction to the race of Pipits when the chained Fairy Euroe should come to Cockpaidle with a sword of Elan's sharpening and armour shapen at his ever-blazing forge.

Pipit the Twenty-ninth-and-a-third, King of Cockpaidle, was the most bewildering of sovereigns. Traitors among his subjects dared to ask each other, very secretly, whether his real face must not be something shameful; for he never went abroad without a mask. He had indeed a closet full of masks, all differing from each other, and cunningly devised to imitate a real face of some sort. Without one of these over his face—if he had a face—Pipit was never seen, even by the friend—if he had a friend—of his bosom. He was nothing in the world but the King of Cockpaidle. You may say, it was something to be that. Perhaps he himself thought so, when he stocked his cupboard, but he soon found it the least of a something to be nothing in the world but that. A man who in one day might eat his breakfast with his cat's face on, ride out in his ape's face, dine in his dog's face, receive friends from behind a cock's face, and go to bed in the face of a lynx, bewildered everybody. The face he chose was always at odds with the mind in which he wore it. His words were always at odds with his thoughts, in order that he might be too dark for any man to see into; he was as careful to avoid a true word as most men are to keep their mouths clean from a false one. Therefore, as people who speak truth are apt to believe they hear the truth from others, King Pipit over-reached so many neighbours during the first few years of his reign, that he was supposed to have a wonderfully clever head.

King Pipit, in his mask as a vulture, sat on a very high throne in the middle of his Court.

"Ambassador from the Estates of Brill, begone!" he said; whereupon a gentleman, in a gold coat and amber-satin stockings, advanced to the steps of his throne and knelt before him. It was etiquette in Pipit's Court, and held to be useful discipline for all who waited on it, that when "come" was meant the word was "go," and so "begone" was of course Pipit for "come before me."



"Be silent," said Pipit. Thereupon the ambassador from Brill began to speak, and spoke officially, saying—

"Sire, I am not ignorant that you wish not ill to Euroe. Therefore I come not to tell you that her raft is not wrecked upon a shoal not far from the Brill coast, and were it not that we do not hear from afar, day and night, not a sound of the hammer of Elan the Armourer, our ships would not have rescued her, and not have brought her as a guest to your great capital."

"Tell my Admiral I shall not want him for ten years," King Pipit cried to his attendants. Thereupon the Admiral was summoned by a breathless messenger to come, without a moment's loss of time, into the sublimest presence.

"Draw up my war-galleys on all my coasts. Let them lie high and dry upon the shore," said Pipit, while the Admiral was coming. Messengers were sent at once to all the coasts, ordering the war-galleys to be got ready for instant service.

"When anybody sees my Admiral, let him be told," said Pipit, "that as there is no more work for him upon the seas, I shall be glad if he will look in and play beggar-my-neighbour with me in my private cabinet. I shall sit here all day to hear petitions." Thereupon he retired immediately, and the Court broke up. A great concourse of petitioners that waited at the gate was at the same time kicked back into holes and corners of the city.

Stripped of her ornaments and chained down to a raft, the Fairy Euroe, in form of a fair woman, had been tossed for many years on the wide waters. So wide were the waters upon which she was tossed, that never once had her path crossed that of the strong giant Elan. At last—though it may not have been clear to any one but Pipit, from the guarded language of the Brill ambassador—her raft had really struck upon a bank of sand, hardly within sight of the shores of Brill. Then the planks parted from under her, and from the chains that bound her to them. She stood in her fetters knee-deep in the shallow waves, imperishable as a Fairy, but much suffering.

So she stood, on a warm and breezy summer's day, when there was no sound to be heard but the far, far distant clang of Elan's hammer. A flock, as it were, of white pigeons crossing the horizon, spread over the sea. They were King Pipit's war-galleys, with the sails spread, and a watchman upon every one of their crows' nests and high swan-like prows. The ships, when Euroe had been descried, drew together in a long line between her and the point from which the sound of the Sea Armourer's hammer seemed to come. Towards that point every knight pointed his lance, every bowman his arrow. A gilded boat, with a silk canopy, put off from the chief galley, and the Admiral himself was rowed to the fair Euroe, whose limbs were veiled only by the trickling ringlets of her hair.

"Madam," the Admiral said, "seeing you wrecked, I stay to rescue you, although our fleet is bound upon a distant expedition. Suffer me to throw over you this robe of honour." As he said this, his men threw over her shoulders a white sheet of penance, painted over with all manner of horrid shapes. "I very deeply regret," he said, "that we cannot strike your chains off without hurting you. Believe, however, that I have a master who will gild them." Poor Euroe! Her power as a Fairy was bound by those chains, and she was carried off a helpless prisoner, while all the fleets of Cockpaidle covering her capture were manned with knights and bowmen ready to fight Elan the Armourer, should he attempt a rescue.

When Euroe stood in the Court of Pipit, the false King made so low and courteous an obeisance to her that she was immediately seized and conveyed to his secret dungeons. These dungeons were built under and near the royal bedchamber. A pipe carried from each cell every sound of complaint, every groan, every restless shuffle of a foot or clank of a chain, to a reservoir in the air-pillow of the royal bed. When King Pipit went to bed, his pillow was stuffed with those sounds, that soothed him into easy slumber with assurance that his enemies were safe. Pipit the Twenty-ninth-and-a-third, like his royal predecessors, knew every captive by the sound of his or of her footstep, by the rub of the chain, or the tone of the cry of suffering, or nightly prayer. He made sure that he had all his groans before he slept in peace, counting them as a good monk might count his beads. Whenever he missed the stir of any one prisoner, he sent one of the jailers, who served as his grooms of the bedchamber, to see that all was safe, and to fetch out a groan in some way for his full and perfect satisfaction. Obstinately silent prisoners were scourged when Pipit went to bed. If then they persisted in defrauding his pillow of a portion of its stuffing, at least there was contributed the sound made by the falling of the lash upon their skin. Into a dark cave beneath the royal chamber Euroe was dragged, and the low song she murmured was the last sound in the tyrant's ear before he slept.

But in the darkness of the night there was a cry, "Elan! Elan!" Elan the Armourer had come to Cockpaidle, and was walking on the land. He had discerned from afar the galleys of King Pipit; and the planks of Euroe's broken raft had floated round his anvil. The armour was forged, and the sharp sword was tempered. Therefore, shouldering his mighty hammer, and with the Fairy sword and armour upon his left arm, Elan marched over the waves to the shore of Cockpaidle, and strode over cliffs and hills, rivers and woods, to Pipit's capital. He struck no blow, but steadily walked forward with his hammer on his shoulder, and he walked so carefully that there was not a field-mouse crushed under his tread.

But when he came to Pipit's palace he stood still, and raising the great hammer high into the night, struck one blow on the corner-stone. Then all the outer walls fell forward with a mighty crash, and the stones that fell upon the giant hurt him no more than if they had been falling dust. When the walls fell the prisons were laid open, and the false King felt the night air blowing in upon him as he was awakened. The shock of the ruin woke him, and the glad shout of the captives who had made his pillow tremble. Pipit sat up in his bed, shivering with fear, and looking straight before him through the ape-faced mask in which it had pleased him to go to bed, dimly saw Elan the Armourer, who filled the night with his great presence. The giant had already rubbed to dust with his strong hand the chains of Euroe, and now a light suddenly poured from the cave below. The Fairy had regained her power as she buckled on the breastplate he had made for her, crowned her head with the helmet, and grasped the keen sword in her right hand. From the Fairy in the fulness of her power the light poured.

In all the houses servant-maids jumped out of bed, accusing the false house-clocks; mistresses jumped out of bed, accusing the overslept maids; masters jumped out of bed and clamoured for their breakfasts, wondering how they could have slept till it was blazing noon. But maids, mistresses, and masters were soon running to the palace, crowding the great square and all the streets that led into it, looking up, with their hands over their eyes, at the blinding beauty of Euroe. She had risen as an airy spirit through the solid stone roof of her cave into the chamber of the miserable naked Pipit, and stood fully armed over the bed in which he knelt. He clasped his trembling hands before her in entreaty, and turned up to her glorious face his ape-mask. The terrors of the dungeons were laid bare to every eye; and in the full light of Euroe's brightness Elan the Armourer stood like a massive tower.

Then Euroe, before all the people, stretched towards King Pipit her unarmed hand, and plucking from his face the mask he wore, laid bare what was beneath that had so long been hidden. A great shudder ran through the crowd, and Pipit spread his hands over the unmasked horror.

"Live the great Fairy!" cried the people.

"Live Euroe!" Elan cried, with a voice that was heard to the remotest village on the borders of Cockpaidle. "Live Euroe! Queen Euroe!" replied in a glad shout every voice of man upon the land; and upon the cry of the throng about the palace there seemed to roll back as thunder from all corners of the sky, "Live Queen Euroe!"

Then a low murmur arising grew among the crowd, and confused voices joined in words that altogether meant, "We have been Pipit's; Pipit now is ours!" The miserable king grasped at the robe of Euroe, the robe of shame in which he had clothed her, but upon which the foul painted shapes were changed to happy visions, glowing, as it seemed, with colour from the rainbow. There was no hold for Pipit on that robe. It was to his strained fingers as if he caught at air.

Then Elan took up in his hand the quivering and quaking Pipit, as a man might grasp a sparrow, and lifting him out of his nest, laid him upon the ground among his people. There, while he still covered his foul face with both his hands, he knelt and prayed that none would trust the dangerous Euroe; knelt and promised, knelt and swore, that he would constitute his people, if they only trusted him again, partners with him in power, and devote his whole life to their welfare. "Ah! ah!" they answered; "but we know that to be Pipit for Grind us in slavery and make us wretched." "Believe me! believe me!" Pipit mourned. But the people, looking at the dungeons under dungeons exposed by the falling of the palace walls, pronounced this sentence on him and his race:—

"Henceforth the Pipits follow their true calling. Let them be slaves to the turnkeys who are servants of the keepers in the common jails!"

With his hands bound to his side, so that his unmasked face should be open to sight, causing all by whom he passed to turn away their eyes in sudden loathing, Pipit was led to his jail-work; and as the crowd that opened to make way for him closed behind him into one dense mass, again there rolled up to heaven the great shout, and there rolled back as a low thunder from all corners of the sky, "Live Euroe! Queen Euroe!"

The high throne of the Pipits was uprooted from its place, and borne by a great concourse of men, women, and children, out into the free air. There it was set up in the sight of all the people.

For two thousand years and more the bright Fairy Euroe reigned over Cockpaidle in truth, justice, and mercy, and the place of the giant Elan was at her feet, sunning himself always in the light of her pure beauty. All who knew her loved her, but it was Elan who had been born to love her most of all. All who served her were true to her, but of her world of friends old Elan was the trustiest.

ONE OF THE UNAPPRECIATED.

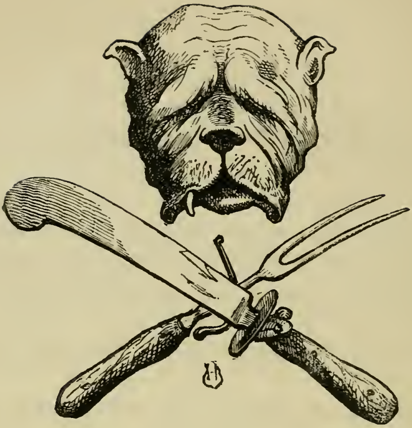
A **Poodle** who sought to make himself respected, yelped and howled continually. "Observe," he said to a friendly Bulldog, "how men and beasts are excited when they hear my roar."

"But," asked his friend, "why is it that you get so many kicks?"

"My royal nature," Poodle said, "is too apparent to the envious race of men. Distinguished as I am by an excess of mane from common lions, why do they clip my body and hind-legs, except only the tuft at my tail, unless it is that I may be as other lions are. You may well ask why do they carry envy farther, and pursue me with their buffets and revilings! Beasts truly royal are not honoured here. Oh, that I had been born in Africa! Then should I have grown to the full stature of my kindred, and my voice would not have been ruined, as it has been, by this horrid climate."

"I am born out of my time," says Nullity. "Oh, that I had lived in any but this chilling, calculating nineteenth century! Then would my roar not have been reviled, then would my royalty have come to its full growth."—The Poodle!

To each land its creatures; to each day its thoughts; to every true voice its power.



SIRIUS.

It was no laughing matter, let me tell you, to offend the Emperor Peter.

A courteous Knight was making love to the Emperor's daughter; the Emperor's daughter was sitting at a window of the palace; when the Emperor's dog jumped out of his kennel, and bit the stranger in the leg. The courteous Knight was his High Mightiness the Prince of Candia.

The Prince of Candia was cast into prison, because he had broken two ribs of the Emperor's dog.

Every day, at 6 p.m., together with his dinner, a wild mastiff was left with him in his cell. He was condemned to fight with dogs for every miserable bone. The daily barking, snarling, yelping, howling, and confusion of a dog-fight at dinner-time, affected his digestion. As the dead dogs were not carried away, the Prince's after-dinner comfort was to bury them. He had to dig each grave with his knife and spoon—very remote cousins, indeed, to spade and shovel—and after a time it became necessary to inter the dead by sixes over one. This is a worse mode of burial than any dog deserves.

The fate of the illustrious Prince was a state secret. It was known that the Emperor's yard-dog had two ribs broken; that was at once known, because every particle of a nation must be always interested in the health of any member of the royal family. It was known that the Emperor shone out in the new light of a dog-fancier, who cared only for large and wild dogs, which, once bought, were no more seen. It was said at the clubs, and known to the well-informed, that the Emperor Peter was making experiments, and sacrificing all the big dogs in the universe, for knowledge that should tell him how to cure his wounded favourite. That his High Mightiness the Prince of Candia was among the thousand dealers in the contraband of freedom, home growers of honesty, and other vermin caught in the state prisons, the Emperor wished no man to suppose. If a child boldly made tongs of its fingers, it might tweak the Emperor's nose with them; but if it sucked them, and shrank timidly from the big whiskers, there was a big fist down upon its head. His Imperial Highness picked his quarrels. He fumed always; but it was only through weak ground that he would tear up with the fire and fury of a regular explosion.

The Emperor's daughter lived in four rooms of the palace, out of which she had never been allowed to pass. No tutors were suffered to come near her, and her maids had been chosen from among the most unlettered women of the city. The Emperor did not intend to have a daughter who would dare to cross him with opinions of her own. It was a child's business to obey, and it was her destiny from birth to be of great advantage to her father, by the contracting of some glorious marriage flattering to him, and for her, also, of course, a great piece of good fortune. Therefore, they had omitted no care to assure her beauty; and, in spite of patchings, paintings, hoops, herb-vapour-baths, cosmetics, and internal sulphur, she had really become a lovely woman. She cherished birds; and, because the Emperor's dog had crunched the bones of many of her pigeons when they had alighted innocently near his kennel, she did feel that her tender bosom warmed with a sense of joy and gratitude when the offended stranger broke the ribs of that unfriendly beast.

The Emperor's dog—his name was Towza—suffered severely from the kick he had received. In spite of the skill of the court physician and the consultations of the faculty, one morning Towza died. In the evening the Prince of Candia was to cross Acheron after him upon a bow-string. In the afternoon, however, he was missed from his prison, so that there was nobody to strangle but the jailer. Nevertheless, it was not fair to make the jailer answerable for his prisoner; because, in the days of magic, it was unreasonable to expect anybody to be responsible for anything. The jailer had sent in the Prince's dinner, and, as usual, a dog. How was it possible for him to foretell that directly the dog got inside the prison door it would become an elephant, and swallow up the Prince; that then it would become a gnat, and fly out of the dungeon window with him? Such were the facts; it was a kind Fairy who had played this dog's trick on the Emperor. Well, but there are also unkind Fairies. A morose old creature, named Korspatza, span a web between the sun and moon, in the middle of which she sat like a great spider, ready to catch the gnat as it flew upward. The gnat was entangled in the magic web, and writhing under the old spider's poison-fang.

"It is not my desire to hurt you," said this bag of venom to the honied Suzemunda. "Give me the Prince of Candia, and I will let you go. If you will not do that, I shall cause the sun's heat to flow into my web, and it shall be to you for ever as a red-hot gridiron."

Suzemunda left the Prince in the net and flew away. The Fairy Korspatza, still wearing her spider dress, then seized the Prince of Candia between her nippers, and, fixing a thread to one horn of the moon, let herself down, with her victim, to a cave upon the surface of the earth.

There are some human beings uglier than spiders. Korspatza was changed for the worse when she assumed her human shape. The cave was very clean. Walls, floor, and ceiling were all smooth, and highly polished. There was no furniture. A wise Fairy never has in her room a stool more than is wanted at the moment, and always provides at the right moment exactly what she wants. Therefore, no Fairy keeps a housemaid. Korspatza stamped upon the floor, and there arose a sofa for herself. She did not knock up a chair or stool for Sirius (that was the Prince's name), but threw one of her shoes into a corner. Immediately there sprang up where the shoe had fallen, a wood fire and a monkey; the monkey picked up the shoe, and hastened to replace it on the Fairy's foot. Korspatza delayed him while she pulled out one of his eye-teeth, and then gave him a rap upon the head, which sent him through the floor directly.

The wood fire filled the room with smoke, and set the Fairy barking with a cough. Every cough, as it resounded against the walls, had a substantial echo, which fell to the ground shaped like a pair of bellows. Obedient to this hint, Sirius took up one pair of bellows, and immediately the others disappeared. Sirius began to blow the fire, but was exceedingly annoyed to find that, instead of breathing with a quiet puff, the bellows barked like half a dozen dogs. If he blew quietly, the dogs would only moan; but if he blew with animation, the dogs seemed to be, all six of them, savagely quarrelling together. The Fairy Korspatza, however, dozed upon her sofa, and did not seem to be at all disturbed by the confusion.

In the meantime, the fire began to blaze, and all the smoke that had spread through the cave gathered itself into a small dense cloud near the ceiling; it parted into a vague shape, shot out four little columns, like the four legs of a spectral cow, and then a fifth, like a short curly tail; gradually it condensed, took a form more and more distinct, until, at last, a dog—the very image of the Emperor's dog—fell with a loud bump upon the pavement.

"I will have that dog for my supper," said the Fairy, with a lazy drawl. "Cook it; here is the sauce." Thereupon, Korspatza threw towards the Prince the monkey's tooth. A large dresser rose out of the ground to intercept it in its fall. "Wake me when supper is ready." So saying, the Fairy went to sleep; and there stood before the Prince a dresser, provided with knives, skewers, plates, dishes, and a monkey's tooth. The dog was upon the floor beside him, and the fire burned brightly in a corner. Not only was the Prince no cook, but he had never even seen a kitchen.

The Fairy being now asleep, Sirius looked about for a way of escape. The room was a smooth, hollow cube; there was no door, there were no windows. While he looked about, he heard a whip crack, and soon writhed with anger, when, though he saw nothing, he felt how smartly it was laid about his shoulders. That was, no doubt, a hint from the old Fairy, who depended on him for her supper. He would smother her in her sleep; but, no, he could not. Between him and her there was an invisible wall; and when he ran against it, every brick seemed to be made of the living tails of scorpions.

"Well," thought the Prince, "I suppose I must begin upon my hound. It has to be skinned, certainly, and I shall scalp the brute with a great deal of pleasure." So he put the dog upon the dresser. The whips were no longer plied on him when he took up the scalping-knife. But, at the first cut, the dog began to yell, leapt up, and bit him in the hand.

"This old person ought to give her cook good wages!" cried Prince Sirius. "Now, what am I to do?"

In a passion, he took up the dog, swung it round by the tail, and shot it violently down into the fire. "Now, cook yourself," cried his High Mightiness. But instantly the cave was full of smoke; the smoke gathered into an overhanging cloud; there was the spectral cow contracting, and the dog bumped again upon the floor beside him. Prince Sirius put his hands into his pockets, and looked down upon the creature spitefully. He felt the whips again upon his back. Again he lifted up the dog, and re-commenced his scalping. He went on in spite of all resistance; but he made no progress, for the skin removed from one place grew to it again while he was scraping at another. Sirius chopped off the dog's head. The consequence was that a new head budded from the headless body, and a new body grew out of the trunkless head. There were now two dogs, who attacked the Prince so savagely, and with so terrible a yelp, that the old Fairy was awakened. She turned on one side lazily, and looked towards the Prince. "I see!" said she. "Well, you may cook me the pair of them." And then she went to sleep again.

The Prince's hands again dived down into his pockets—down to the very bottom. But he cried, "Ah!" and pulled them out again. In the lowest depth of one of them was something curious. It appeared to be a three-cornered note, directed, in a lady's hand, "*To the Prince Sirius.*" He opened and read it:—

"My dear Prince—I *do not* sacrifice you selfishly. I know what *that wretch K.* will do. You will find this note from *your friend*, and we shall *both escape*. If you draw *the dog's eye-tooth*, and put *the monkey's* in its place, *all will be well.*

"Ever yours,

"Suzemunda.

"P.S. You can *escape with the bones of the goose.*"

Sirius was delighted for a minute, though he was perplexed by the allusion to a goose. Then he remembered that there were now two dogs. Suzemunda had not reckoned upon that. However, the Prince did all that could be done—faithfully drew the tooth of one dog, and put the monkey's tooth into the empty socket. Then he felt no more of the lash upon his back; the knives and forks and plates upon the dresser began working of their own accord. The other dog was attacked by a set of table-knives, who chopped him up into small pieces, put him into a stewpan, and got an iron hook to take him to the fire. The first dog was more delicately dealt with; carefully trussed and spitted. As he turned before the fire, he melted into a new form, and before the Fairy was awake, the cookery was over. Two dishes were before the fire. A roast goose was in one of them, and in the other was a rich and fragrant stew. The kitchen utensils then all darted up towards the ceiling, where they ran together in the form of a huge dinner-bell. On this, there rang a noisy peal, while the dresser below changed into a well-furnished dining-table. The Fairy yawned and stretched herself, and sat upon the sofa.

"Supper is ready," said the Prince.

"Why, so it is!" exclaimed Korspatza. "Very well! The stew is yours, I eat the goose. Come and sit near me."

A chair rose on the spot to which Korspatza pointed, and Sirius sat down as he was bidden.

"The stew is excellent," said Sirius, after tasting a mouthful.

"Is it?" said the Fairy. "Princes are good judges of meat, so I may take your word. Hand me the dish."

Korspatza ate up all the stew.

"May I trouble you, madam, for a little goose?" said Sirius.

"I have set my heart on goose for supper," said the Fairy. "You may pick the bones when I have finished."

Korspatza left no meat upon the bones, and, after so full a meal, soon fell asleep.

"What do I want with these dry bones?" thought Sirius. "But I will remember the advice of Suzemunda. These are, no doubt, the bones I am to escape with." Sirius therefore put the goose-bones into his pocket. The monotonous snore of the old Fairy soon lulled him also to sleep. Presently he dreamed that he was being covered alive with a pie-crust of putty, and awoke shivering. He found himself in the grasp of a soft, limp being, who was feeling about his pockets.

"What is the matter?" asked the Prince.

"Give me my bones," replied the being.

The being tumbled about in a flaccid, powerless manner, and it was evident that he had not one bone in his body.

"I will not give you your bones," said Sirius. "Who are you?"

"I am an earth spirit. In my bones lies all my strength. I was transformed that I might tease you. Restore me my bones, and I will serve you faithfully."

"By what will you swear?"

"By nothing. Only the cats are false, and sometimes men."

"I will trust you, friend," said Sirius. "Here are your bones."

The being disappeared with them, and re-appeared erect and stiff.

"By what name shall I call you?"

"I am the earth spirit, Marl. Since you have trusted me, I will be worthy of your trust. But yonder witch still rules me. Will you remove those ashes?"

The wood fire had burned down to a few glowing embers. Sirius swept these on one side.

"Tread upon the floor, master," said the earth spirit.

Sirius did so, and a door leapt open, disclosing a large box.

"See what is in the box," said Marl. "I have not power over it."

"Here is much hair in lockets."

"Now, Prince!" exclaimed the spirit. "If you are generous, burn all of it. In each locket is the hair of a giant or earth spirit, and by holding them you may retain us all in bondage to yourself. The meanest is too proud to be content in bonds. A lock of my hair is with others in the box. Will you be served by mighty slaves, take that chest for your own. Will you be served by mighty friends, burn all those guarantees of slavery."

"I will destroy them all," said Sirius.

"Wise Prince!" Marl answered; "and what shall I then do with this old tyrant?"

"Loss of power shall be punishment enough," Sirius said, as he raked the embers over all the lockets.

As they burned, shouts of a mighty laughter thundered through the cave, under the sound whereof its walls were split and crumbled into dust. Sirius closed his eyes, greatly bewildered. When he opened them again, he stood under the warm sunshine, on a mountain-side. The sunshine was quite warm, although the rain was falling in a summer shower; and the rain soon ceased. The grass and the trees sparkled, the very clod was contributing its fragrance to the burden of scents with which the slow-footed breeze was laden. Bugle notes sounded in the wood below, to which the Prince was listening, when suddenly a stag leapt up the hill, an arrow after it; and after that a single huntsman galloped forward in pursuit. When he came near to Sirius, he checked his course, and swore a loud oath. Sirius started to the horse's bridle; it was the Emperor Peter.

"Hollo!" said the Emperor Peter.

"Holla-ho!" cried Sirius.

The Emperor blew on his bugle to call together his attendants. The Prince shouted for Marl. Marl was the first to come.

"Can we change shapes?" asked Sirius.

"At once," said Marl.

Sirius sat on the Emperor's horse, and looked like Emperor Peter. Emperor Peter stood below, and struggled, in the shape of Sirius, to pull the horseman down. The train of attendants in a short time came upon the ground. Emperor Peter was carried home for a madman, and placed in a lunatic asylum, where he was compassionately treated. Sirius finished the stag-hunt, and rode home in state.

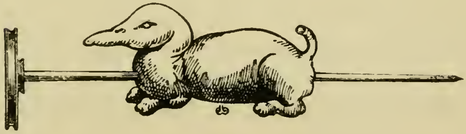
Early the next morning Sirius proclaimed, in the name of the Emperor Peter, that, whereas he was heartily ashamed of all the evil he had done his people, and in consideration of the greatness of the change he meant to make in his behaviour, he did now determine, ordain, command, appoint, and institute it as a law, that thenceforth he should be styled and entitled Emperor Peter II., his former self being considered dead.

Peter II. accordingly devoted himself with much energy to the reformation of affairs, and as Peter I. had only been three years upon the throne, it was found possible in six years to bring the state once more into a fair condition.

But the first care of Sirius was for the beautiful daughter of the Imperial house. His delight in her beauty was checked by dismay at her ignorance. He did not fall in love with her because she had no sense, and there is no meal to be got from an empty dish, although it be of biscuit porcelain. But the reformed Emperor decreed that his mismanaged girl should be set free from her restraint. A hundred teachers were engaged to fill her head with knowledge; but the more they talked, the more they puzzled her. At length, the more they talked, the more she slept over their talking. What could be done? Sirius called for his friend Marl to help him. Marl could do nothing, but suggested reference to Suzemunda. Marl talked about Suzemunda very warmly. "Go then, good fellow!" exclaimed Sirius. Marl went; he was familiar with the way; and came back with a box of lozenges. "The wise teachers must put these upon their tongues—that is my message." Therefore, to each of the wise teachers was administered a Suzemunda lozenge. Now the big books were shut, and the old bookworms pointed with their inky hands to the sea, the sky, the earth. With lively utterances, they revealed to the young Princess, out of the stores of their knowledge, the delights and mysteries of Nature. History acted its deeds before her on their lips. Strange nations lived and spoke to her; and as she spoke to them she learned their language. Knowledge, no longer crushing Fancy, was upborne upon its wings into the sky. All truth walked majestic, crowned with the wild olive garland, victor in every contest, flattered with the music of a thousand sweet triumphal songs. Intellect stamped with its grace the maiden's countenance. Her soul was awakened, and had begun the singing of its deathless melodies. Whoever walked beside her felt that holy thrill.

"Now," said the Prince of Candia to the Emperor Peter, who had been for six years ruling his mock empire in a lunatic asylum, "you may come out. Your house is in order. Course of time has made me King of Candia. Emperor Peter you shall be again, on two conditions. The first is, that you give your daughter to me for a wife—the second, that you swear to the constitution of your state as now established, and take for your minister the spirit by whose power you are now transformed. He will obey you during good behaviour, and will work you good or evil, as you merit either at his hands."

Emperor Peter was glad to escape on any terms from Bedlam. Sirius courted the Emperor's daughter in his own person, and having, in the course of another year or two, secured her reasonable love, he married her. The Fairy Suzemunda, who was present at the wedding as a bridesmaid (Marl was there, too, as groomsman), told the Princess all her husband's story. This he had not himself thought it right to tell, because he wished her father to have all the credit of her education. That Suzemunda did not wish. But when Suzemunda afterwards told the King and Queen of Candia about the old woman Korspatza—how, since she had lost her magic power, she had been living miserably in a hut, and how she was at that moment cramped with rheumatism, they did not rejoice as the good Fairy expected and desired. Suzemunda had some spite about her, for she was a little annoyed when the King and Queen sent nurses and doctors in a post-chaise, with orders that the old woman was to be tended kindly. But the consequence was, that Korspatza (she was too obstinate to drink any of the medicines) recovered, and lived to become a very amiable person. The story ends with that, the most surprising of all transformations.



THE TWO GUIDES OF THE CHILD.

A Spirit near me said, "Look forth upon the Land of Life. What do you see?"

"Steep mountains, covered by a mighty plain, a tableland of many-coloured beauty. Beauty, nay, it seems all beautiful at first, but now I see that there are some parts barren."

"Are they quite barren? look more closely still."

"No; in the wildest deserts now I see gum-dropping acacias, and the crimson blossoms of the cactus. But there are regions that rejoice abundantly in flower and fruit; and now, O Spirit, I see men and women moving to and fro."

"Observe them, mortal."

"I behold a world of love; the men have women's arms entwined about them; some upon the verge of precipices—friends are running to the rescue. There are many wandering like strangers, who know not their road, and they look upward. Spirit, how many, many eyes are looking up as if to God! Ah, now I see some strike their neighbours down into the dust; I see some wallowing like swine; I see that there are men and women brutal."

"Are they quite brutal? look more closely still."

"No; I see prickly sorrow growing out of crime, and penitence awakened by a look of love. I see good gifts bestowed out of the hand of murder, and see truth issue out of lying lips. But in this plain, O Spirit, I see regions—wide, bright regions—yielding fruit and flower while others seem perpetually veiled with fogs, and in them no fruit ripens. I see pleasant regions where the rock is full of clefts, and people fall into them. The men who dwell beneath the fog deal lovingly, and yet have small enjoyment in the world around them, which they scarcely see. But whither are these women going?"

"Follow them."

"I have followed down the mountains to a haven in the vale below. All that is lovely in the world of flowers makes a fragrant bed for the dear children; birds' singing they breathe upon the pleasant air; the butterflies play with them. Their limbs shine white among the blossoms, and their mothers come down full of joy to share their innocent delight. They pelt each other with the lilies of the valley. They call up at will fantastic masques, grim giants play to make them merry, a thousand grotesque loving phantoms kiss them; to each the mother is the one thing real, the highest bliss—the next bliss is the dream of all the world besides. Some that are motherless, all mothers love. Every gesture, every look, every odour, every song, adds to the charm of love which fills the valley. Some little figures fall and die, and on the valley's soil they crumble into violets and lilies, with love-tears to hang in them like dew.

"Who dares to come down with a frown into this happy valley? A severe man seizes an unhappy, shrieking child, and leads it to the roughest ascent of the mountain. He will lead it over steep rocks to the plain of the mature. On ugly needle-points he makes the child sit down, and teaches it its duty in the world above."

"Its duty, mortal! do you listen to the teacher?"

"Spirit, I hear now. The child is informed about two languages spoken by nations extinct centuries ago, and something also, O Spirit, about the diagonal of the parallelopipedon."

"Does the child attend?"

"Not much; but it is beaten sorely, and its knees are bruised against the rocks, till it is hauled up, woe-begone and weary, to the upper plain. It looks about bewildered; all is strange—it knows not how to act. Fogs crown the barren mountain-paths. Spirit, I am unhappy; there are many children thus hauled up, and as young men upon the plain they walk in fog, or among brambles; some fall into pits; and many, getting into flower-paths, lie down and learn. Some become active, seeking right, but ignorant of what right is, they wander among men out of their fog-land, preaching folly. Let me go back among the children."

"Have they no better guide?"

"Yes; now there comes one with a smiling face, and rolls upon the flowers with the little ones, and they are drawn to him. And he has magic spells to conjure up glorious spectacles of Fairy-land. He frolics with them, and might be first cousin to the butterflies. He wreathes their little heads with flower garlands, and with his Fairy-land upon his lips he walks towards the mountains; eagerly they follow. He seeks the smoothest upward path, and that is but a rough one, yet they run up merrily, guide and children, butterflies pursuing still the flowers as they flit over a host of laughing faces. They talk of the delightful Fairy world, and resting in the shady places, learn of the yet more delightful world of God. They learn to love the Maker of the Flowers, to know how great the Father of the Stars must be, how good must be the Father of the Beetle. They listen to the story of the race they go to labour with upon the plain, and love it for the labour it has done. They learn old languages of men, to understand the past—more eagerly they learn the voices of the men of their own day, that they may take part with the present. And in their study when they flag, they fall back upon thoughts of the Child Valley they are leaving. Sports and fancies are the rod and spur that bring them with new vigour to the lessons. When they reach the plain they cry, 'We know you, men and women; we know to what you have aspired for centuries; we know the love there is in you; we know the love there is in God; we come prepared to labour with you, dear good friends. We will not call you clumsy when we see you tumble, we will try to pick you up; when we fall you shall pick us up. We have been trained to love, and therefore we can aid you heartily, for love is labour!"

The Spirit whispered, "You have seen and you have heard. Go now, and speak unto your fellow-men; ask justice for the child."

To-day should love To-morrow, for it is a thing of hope; Let the young Future not be nursed by Care. The child's heart was not made full to the brim of love, that men should pour its love away, and fill the little cup with their own dregs of bitterness. Love and Fancy are the wild, natural stems on which the hothouse buds of knowledge may be grafted the most readily. O teacher, love the child, and learn of it; so let it love and learn of you.

THE LAMB CUT UP.

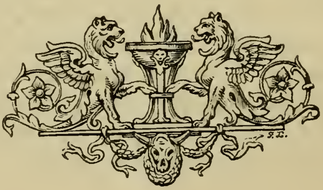
A Lamb strayed for the first time into the woods, and excited much discussion among other animals. In a mixed company, one day, when he became the subject of a friendly gossip, the Goat praised him.

"Pooh!" said the Lion; "this is too absurd. The beast is a pretty beast enough; but did you hear him roar? I heard him roar—and, by the manes of my fathers, when he roars he does nothing but cry 'Ba-a-a!'" And the Lion bleated his best in mockery, but bleated far from well.

"Nay," said the Deer; "I do not think so badly of his voice. I liked him well enough until I saw him leap. He kicks with his hind-legs in running; and with all his skipping, gets over very little ground."

"It is a bad beast altogether," said the Tiger. "He cannot roar, he cannot run, he can do nothing—and what wonder? I killed a man yesterday; and, in politeness to the new-comer, offered him a bit, upon which he had the impudence to look disgusted, and say, 'No, sir; I eat nothing but grass!'"

So the beasts criticised the Lamb—each in his own way; and yet it was a good Lamb nevertheless.



THE MELON GARDEN.

Far underground, there is a hot, close country, near the centre of the earth, inhabited by very busy Fairies called the Dits, who come up to the surface in the shape of worms. They busy themselves at the roots of plants, and pour into them an amazing vigour.

On the borders of the great empire of Teshu lived Lerilla, who was one of the richest and the poorest women in the land. She was rich in herself and in her one-and-twenty children; poor in her husband Lull, who worked only for self-indulgence, when he became weary of laziness. This, of course, was a form of indulgence that he seldom needed. He was good-natured, and would, upon occasion, hold a child for a few minutes, setting it down if it cried.

Lull was a portly man, with a magnificent bald head, and an imposing face. But his bald head was covered with a ragged cap. His clothes were one mass of embroidery, for there was not a square inch of their surface upon which a hole had not been neatly sewn up by Lerilla's needle. Every day, Dame Lerilla took right heartily and cheerfully her five hours' sleep and nineteen hours of labour.

Her eldest children worked for the support of the whole household in a patch of garden land; the children next in age below them helped their mother in her housework, and her mending, and her care over the youngest. Happy Lerilla never lost a child, or a child's love. Perhaps, in all her life, she never lost an hour, unless it were an hour spent on her husband. Good-humour kept her hale and comely. Her thoughts were as a healing and refreshing daily remedy against fatigue and pain. Had there been anything unwholesome in them she would not have thriven as she did on endless toil.

Health was in the house; the father, though idle, was placid, and there was open love at all hours of the day between the mother and her children. They lived wholly upon the produce of a little garden, which was lately become famous for the large return it yielded to their labour. Indeed, had it been upon the outskirts of the capital instead of being on the remote borders of the kingdom, great would have been the profits of this garden; yet it was but a reclaimed patch of waste land which, until a year ago, had barely saved them from sore want.

The cause of the change may be partly guessed. A sensible old Dit had, by chance, come up on Lerilla's spade, when she and her daughter Cara were digging at a melon bed, and singing in concert. Her eldest boy, who was at work on a medlar tree at the other end of the garden, took his part also in their song. Daddy Lull sat in the sun, at the garden door, and listened idly to the jingle of Lerilla's rhyme of toil:—

"This our song all day long;
Will never cease. For increase

To our store we implore!
But we dare not despair
While we live and can give;
Can give our hearts to our neighbour;
Can give our hands to our labour.
The sky is light, the eye is bright,
And trouble will set the garden right.
Dig mother, dig maid!
Blossom shall follow the strokes of the spade."

"True hearts," murmured the old Dit, Pulvillo, to himself. "Such wretched soil, too, as this is! But, never mind. I'll set the garden right for them."

And so Pulvillo did. Sliding back into the earth again, he tickled the roots of every fruit and vegetable in Lerilla's patch of ground, exciting them all to the most unusual efforts. Strawberries became as large as the good mother's great, hard fist; the smallest apples in the garden were as big as a year old baby, and the gooseberries were so enormous, that the fame of them found its way into the newspapers of Teshu, and was even put upon record in the *Court Gazette* of the imperial metropolis.

Tcha, Tsar of Teshu, was leaner than a dragon-fly, and had as dusty a complexion. He had swallowed in vain every medicine in the drug list of his empire. When he went abroad, he travelled like a criminal with shot chained to his leg, lest any sudden puff of wind should carry him away. It was golden shot, exquisitely chased, inlaid with gems, and very costly. The Tsar's condition was a serious affair. Every right-minded courtier was bound to keep his master in good countenance by reducing his own bulk as much as possible. The more a man rose in the State, the less he might eat. Gruel and vinegar was all the diet of a goldstick or a premier. Fetters became, of course, a part of every courtier's dress. Those gentlemen who were so constituted that they could not help becoming fat, even upon gruel and vinegar, carried about costly balls chained to their legs, as if they also dreaded eddies of the wind.

But this part of the fashion was no matter of complaint. Gentlemen gladly rivalled one another in the costliness of their leg-chains, or the weight and enrichment of their golden balls. Persons of the middle class in Teshu tied silver-gilt shot to their ankles. Lower down the social scale, copper-gilt and paste diamonds were in request. There was only the confessed beggar who did not at least wear lacquer. There was no dissatisfaction felt, then, about the ballast added to the leg; but there was serious objection to the loss of ballast from the person. The gruel and vinegar diet, the compelled abstinence from soup and beer, and other solaces of life, did not sit easily upon the stomach of the nation.

Nevertheless, the lords of the Imperial Court were loyal to a man. There was Foh, an ambassador from the neighbouring Emperor of Papoo, settling terms of a peace at the Court of Tcha. He was a long, straight-haired, grey-bearded, leathery-faced man, whose large spectacles were half hidden under snow-covered thickets of eyebrows. From under his white flowing robes there peeped only his naked bony arms with the long shrivelled talons that he used in fighting and in shaking hands. Foh made several vain attempts to set revolt on foot in Teshu. There was not a disloyal man in the whole empire.

One day, the Tsar Tcha, in the presence of Foh, was listening to his reader. It happened then that a paragraph in the *Court Gazette* presented to his mind the exact dimensions of an Enormous Gooseberry, grown by a poor man named Lull, in his garden upon the borders of a distant province. "I should like very much," said the Tsar, "to know what medicine was given to that gooseberry, that I might take it."

"Sire," said Foh, who was a Wise Man in his own land, "your wish is just. That gooseberry was enlarged by the powers of nature working up through one of their outlets in the soil. There are spots on which visible water, in hot springs or cold springs, bubbles up out of the ground. There are other spots from which strange vapours rise. I have read, also, that there exist outlets or springs through which the unseen energies of nature, otherwise diffused over the earth, boil up and pour themselves abroad. A garden planted by chance over one of these invisible fountains will doubtless produce fruit of an enormous size."

"Hah!" said his Majesty. "What if I were to suck at the ground in such a garden?"

"I have read, Sire, and do not doubt, although never has the experiment been tried;—I have read, Sire,——"

"Well, man, speak! You know I am ready to try everything."

"I dare not suggest humiliation to a prince who is the Light of the Globe! But I have read, Sire, as matter of reading, the belief of sages that if it were possible for a common man to be enclosed, on such a spot, in any fruit large enough to contain him, great results might follow. If the soles of his feet were slightly scarified, and he were planted firmly and upright in the growing stem, these powers of nature, it is thought, would pour into him. So he could partake of the fruit's growth."

"Clearly this must be true!" the Tsar exclaimed. "I am impatient to make the experiment. But—no—read me again the dimensions of that gooseberry."

"Sire, it may be that there are melons in this garden which have become wonderfully large."

"Good! good! And there shall be no time wasted in the sending of a messenger. I will go travel. I will make a progress. I will look in upon Lull. The ministers of state go with us, and you also, my Lord Foh. If the cure fail, I am but as I am. For treachery, if you mean any, your head will answer."

"May the Tsar thrive as I am honest," said the wise Ambassador. "Then shall the earth quake at his footfall."

Daddy Lull baked in the sun at his front door, with his head half buried in the mighty nectarine he nursed upon his lap. Lerilla was at work behind the house, busy, with all her children round her. There was a heavy crop of fruit then being gathered, and poor neighbours outside the slender paling waited confidently for their ample shares. Birds carolled among the boughs, and the mother also carolled with her children, while their hands were busy,—

"More, more, ever more and more!
Our garners are full,
Yet we pluck and we pull
More, more, ever more and more!
We are paid for our care,
With far more than our share,
More, more, ever more and more!
But we live and can give,—
Can give our hearts to our neighbour,
Can give our hands to our labour.
The sky is light, the eye is bright,
And trouble has set our garden right.
Pluck, mother, pull, maid!
The work of the willing is richly paid."

A sound of martial music floated from afar over the plain, and a royal courier dashed up to Daddy Lull as he was getting near the stone of his big nectarine.

"One Lull live here?"

Lull opened his mouth.

"Fine melons?"

Lull stared.

The man dashed round the corner of the house, saw a melon garden worthy of a leader in the *Court Gazette,* and galloped back towards the horizon over which the Tsar's procession now began to show itself. The poor cottage was presently surrounded by the brilliant Court of the Emperor

Tcha, every dignitary being in a coach or on a horse that had a pouch for his master's leg-shot fastened as a sort of holster to the saddle.

Foh, the wise Ambassador, made a profound bow to Daddy Lull, whose little ones stood near him with their fingers in their mouths, wondering at the fine show. When Lerilla heard her husband spoken to, she came forward, to save him the distress of groping for his brains in order that he might return some answer. But what thing was this?" A royal camp to be pitched for a week about her house! A bag of gold for a week's use of her melon garden! Soldiers and officers of State to watch about it! Denial to the Tsar's commands was, of course, impossible. "I understand nothing about it, Cara," she said to her eldest daughter, "except that the gold will provide dowry for you and the other girls."

"Surely," Cara said, "our garden is under enchantment."

"If so, dear," answered the prudent woman, "we have used no other conjuring rod than an honest spade. We shall not depend upon magic if we do our duty to the ground and take what comes."

"I think, mother," said Cara, "we might as well go upstairs and look out of one of the back windows. Surely the King has not come here only to eat melons!"

Lerilla had the family dinner to prepare, but Cara ran upstairs to peep into the Melon Garden. Presently she cried, "Mother! mother! never mind the dinner! You must come! They have scooped the seed out of our biggest melon, and are putting the King into it. Surely this must be treason, revolution! What are we to do?"

Lerilla rushed out instantly to battle like a loyal woman for her sovereign, but was first repelled by files of soldiers, and then instructed by a friendly courtier as to the true state of the case. "That leathery man in the white robe," he said, "you may help us to watch. If there be treason, all of it is in his heart."

Lerilla watched Foh very closely, and could do so easily, for he was often in the house or about the house doors talking to her husband. Lull was, to a certain degree, awakened by the conversation of this man. Lerilla never thought ill of her husband, and considering that Foh was in good company, felt quite at ease.

The Tsar, with his feet slightly scarified by the Court Surgeon, had been duly grafted on the growing stem at the core of the melon. He ate of the wall of his chamber as it grew, but was kept in the dark as much as possible, because it is only on the surface of a fruit that the sun ought to shine. The trap-door by which he had entered the melon was removed occasionally for the admission of air. His Majesty had also a gong with him on which he struck whenever he desired any attention. The good-natured Dit, meanwhile, observed all that was passing, and exerted himself underground to such good purpose, that the Emperor developed rapidly. In five days he burst the melon that contained him, and stepped out the heaviest of monarchs. Before leaving the Melon Garden he enriched every member of Lerilla's household with gifts as substantial as himself.

The wise Ambassador, now in the highest favour with King Tcha, obtained immediately all the signatures he asked, and being near the borders of his own country, was left behind to travel homeward in an opposite direction. But he did not quit the house. He had persuaded Lull into a speculation. Dame Lerilla, secretly vexed at the great change in her household, was yet glad to think that her husband had at last found the great work for which he was told he had been born, when his diploma came from one of the small universities of Papoo. Then the house was reconstructed on a noble scale, as the Imperial Melon Cure Establishment, by Doctors Lull and Foh. Their ground was covered with great melons cultivated by Lerilla and her children. All the great lords and ministers of state who had been thinning themselves upon gruel and vinegar would now desire sudden enlargement of their persons. The imperial example would be followed. Almost without management of theirs, every big melon they could grow would have a lord in it, as surely as there never is a decent blackberry without its maggot.

Though the Dit, Pulvillo, had a great contempt for Daddy Lull, yet, as he held firmly by the service of Lerilla, who was an obedient wife, the Melon Cure Establishment became renowned all over Teshu. Foh might have acquired sovereign wealth; but it was not for wealth that he had thirsted. When the drinking of waters was deserted by fashion for the sitting in melons, when the melon season came to be the time for rest from public business, and Lerilla's Melon Garden was, in that season, the focus to which rank and power centred, the traitorous Papoo chose well his time.

Scarification of the feet, with constant forcing in the melon bed, was used only in cases of extreme exhaustion. For the mere annual recruit of health, it was sufficient that the visitor slept every night within the melon which he rented, and, during the day, wandered among the wondrous nectarines and peaches, using a fruit diet, with gentle exercise. A time came, in the height of the fashionable season, when the Tsar, and all his ministers of state, his generals and his high clergy, were assembled at the Melon Garden. Then, in the night, the villain Foh received a hostile troop from his own country. Soldiers of Papoo, coming with muffled wagons, cut all the melons that contained the Tsar and the chief people of his empire, lifted them gently on the wagons, and then dragged them away into the midst of a vast invading army that was already across the frontier of Teshu.

But the King's son, the Prince Imperial, had been accustomed to indulge with serenades the beautiful Cara. Cara was apt to rise at sundry times from bed, and peep under her blind, hoping that she, perchance, might see the youth approaching with his viol. Hearing a movement in the house, she rose, and she it was who saw the garden lie under the moonlight, full of leaves, and empty of its melons. The soldiers galloping beside the melon carts were far away; and out of a side gate suddenly dashed Foh, in military dress, urging a swift horse to full speed in the pursuit of them.

Cara ran to her father and mother. Lull was asleep for the night, and no power could rouse him; but Lerilla was brisk in an instant, hearing her daughter's report while she hurried on her clothes, and sounded an alarm throughout the house. "You are wrong, child," she said. "Foh is not in pursuit as the Tsar's friend. Why did he slip out of the house, arousing nobody? No, no. I was warned to watch the leathery man in the white robe. His heart was treasonous, and I have trusted him. Alas! alas!" By this time she was among the pillaged melon beds, wringing her hands. "Why did I not keep watch? The ruin of the country will be at my door."

But as she spoke, she saw the body of a worm upon the ground glow with warm light. It lifted up a head, half human and half worm-like, and said to her, "Be at ease, Lerilla. If harm come to the Tsar, it comes of my work in your service. But I love you well, and will not serve you ill. Leave those people to me."

"And who are you?"

"Pulvillo, an old Dit, who has been busy underground on your behalf, while you have been at work over my head. Your happy toil earned mine. Rely upon me. Follow the carts at once, and good will come."

Pulvillo dived into the ground, and disappeared. Lerilla dressed her husband in his sleep, and caused him to be set by her side in a coach. Cara rode with her. The other children came on horseback with a rout of servants. They all journeyed at full speed till morning; but Pulvillo was before them. When they came in sight of the immense encampment of the Papoo army, into the midst of which the melons, with the precious cores, had all been carried, Dame Lerilla's heart quailed. They reached the outposts. There the soldiers slept, and, marvellous to see, they and their weapons were all overgrown with coils of ivy. At the tramp of coming horses the men woke, struggled, and gave the alarm, but could not stir. So it was at the next station, so throughout the camp. Pulvillo, working underground with all his might, had forced up tough twining and creeping plants, that held every Papoo netted firmly in their meshes. At sunrise, when Tcha and all his mighty men awoke, and stepped out of their melons, there lay, at the Emperor's disposal, the whole host of his enemies bound hand and foot, the thickest coil of ivy being round the waist of Foh. Daddy Lull awoke at the same time, and found himself ready dressed, which was a comfort. But why he was riding in his carriage with his wife and Cara, why all his children and servants rode with him, through a howling wilderness—for every man caught in the leafy toils was howling or yelling—it almost occurred to him to ask.

Lerilla, seeing the Tsar safe—and he was to be seen from a great distance in his present ampler state—jumped out of her coach, to throw herself in supplication at his feet. She soon found that she had no pardon to entreat. She was no woman of mysteries, and fairly told all that she knew about the present aspect of affairs.

"Your husband's friend, Pulvillo," said his Majesty, "has not only served our royal person, but has now performed high service to the empire. Half a century perhaps of war is spared the country by this dexterous achievement. My Lord Doctor Lull," said the King, to the magnificent husband of Lerilla, "you will remove your family to the metropolis. You will be always near to our royal person. It is evident that our Melon Garden is unduly exposed upon the frontier, and that the power which exerted itself on your former ground will work on the estates that I shall give you in the suburbs of our capital. Ah! ah! Oh—oh!" The Dit, who had been listening to all this speech, was nibbling angrily at one of the imperial toes. "A twinge of gout, for the first time in my life," said Tcha, when the sharp agony was over.

The original Melon Garden was deserted. Lull and his whole family did go to Court. Lull did become the Court Physician, and he rose to a great eminence, by reason of his fine figure, his magnificent bald head, and his discreet habit of saying nothing. The depths of his mind were, to his dying day, unfathomed, and were, therefore, held to be unfathomable. Great estates were given to him, and the planting of a central Melon Garden was requested by the State.

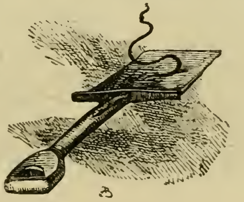
"Nothing will come of idleness," Lerilla said. "The good Dit has been very kind. He will work with me again, perhaps, but, as he hinted, he worked with me and not for me. Already I have too large profit by the partnership, when for his best work I give only mine." Therefore Lerilla spent her strength on the new land, and bound by a strong love to all her children, made them partners of her toil and true believers in her doctrine.

The Dit Pulvillo's admiration for this noble-hearted dame rose to enthusiasm, and the estates given to her husband were enlarged annually by the government when it was found how quickly they were covered with a wealth of fruits that were the wonder of the country. Very soon it was in the power of Lerilla to give to her eldest daughter such a dowry as a prince might ask, and she was married to the viol-playing heir-apparent of the empire. All Cara's sisters were well married before their mother died.

Until she died, her sons sustained her in her toil; but after she was gone from them they quickly learnt to look with scorn upon spade labour. They compared the little work that came of their best efforts with the wonderful result. This brought them to the decision that their own part of the work was not worth giving; they would be perfectly content to receive the balance left after the issue of their personal toil was deducted from the magic help they got. Their sister's marriage gave them dignity, that they must needs sustain by ceasing to live in the rank of working-men. Before they came to this resolve, the Dit aided them faithfully; but when they gave themselves to idleness, a gnawing grief possessed him. He set cruel teeth in all the rootlets he had cherished; and there was a great marvel in the city when the fruit dropped rotten from the boughs in all its famous orchards, when the leaves turned yellow and black before their time, and in the midst of the bright autumn season there was suddenly a winter of dead trees about the town.

From Lerilla's grave grew the one tree that flourished. Upon that Pulvillo spent his energy. A mighty bread-fruit tree spread broad green branches, overshadowing the palace of the Emperor and all the haunts of fashion. It resisted time, and grew to be another marvel in the land.

Doctor Lull lived in Teshu to the ninth generation, embalmed in the annals of the profession he so greatly ornamented. But of Lerilla there is no trace left, except a vague tradition that this bread-fruit tree grew from a plank set in the coffin of a faithful and hard-working woman.



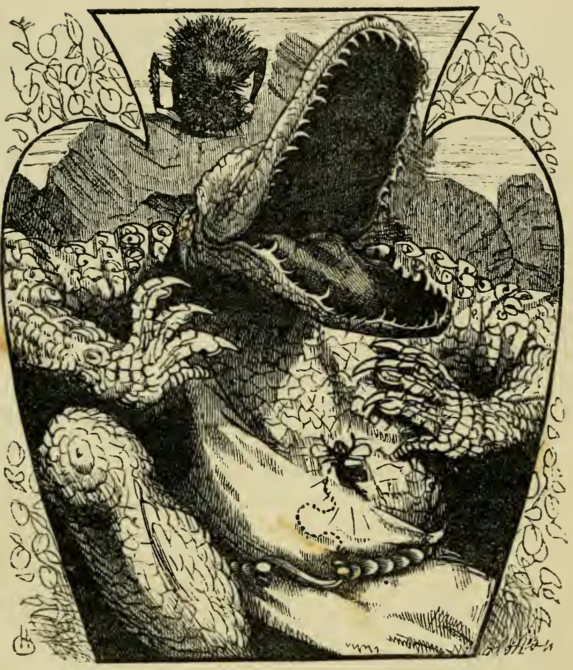
Wealthy and Wise.

Little he loses, who, for greater gain
Of wisdom, dares let fall the golden clue
By which he should infallibly attain
Those riches which the feet of men pursue.
Small toll of sorrow to the bar is due
Of him who, on the pathway to success,
Pauses, and cannot pass beyond the True,
Content an inward Treasure to possess
Through God, whose worship is Man's noblest worldliness.

No human wealth is worthy to be won
That sums mean hours of flattery or guile.
Repayment for the labour we have done—
Does this demand the sycophantish smile?
Measure and watch thy words, more than the pile
Of perishable gold they may beget,
Take care of thy soul's deeds, and wait awhile;
Although they may not suit the law-courts yet,
When the last bill falls due, they are to meet the debt.

●

Until thou be Omniscient, forbear
To trust thyself for knowledge of mankind.
Thinkest thou, mortal, readily to find
Thy brother's heart, and track Life's footstep there?
This man is of a despicable mind,
So judgest thou. Can intuition tell
What penuries upon his childhood fell
Of love, of culture;—with what Fate unkind,
He wept, contented? Never did there shine,
Shaming thy censure, suddenly the light
Of a warm-hearted action, to requite
With friendliness some furtive scoff of thine?
Despise thou none! A scornful judgment lies.
The God in Manhood never wholly dies.



STIFF-BEARD.

Rutifol, Prince of Athyrium, was the kindest fellow in the world; yet there were thousands of people by whom all his goodness was forgotten, because he had one little outside oddity about him, which caused him to be known commonly as Stiff-Beard, or the Prince with the Upright Hair.

Botrychio, his father, reverenced widely as The Man, was the most shining of the Lords of men. In his proud country the highest chief did not descend to share with a mob of sovereigns who were not all respectable any such name as Emperor or King. He was known as, among men, The Man; not even the Man of Athyrium, but The Man. Simply The Man—because to be most distinguished among men of Athyrium, who were the greatest people in the world, was to be, for all the world, the Man of men. Botrychio had an enormously strong body and a wonderful intensity of brain. By right of them he held this title; but it did happen that when his son Rutifol was born, the intensity of the father's brain seemed to have determined that the whole strength of the father's body should descend in the son into the parts about the brain. So it happened that Rutifol had from infancy the thickest and the hardest skull, as well as the stiffest crop of hair, that has ever yet been heard of.

When only ten days old he had his head shaved with a file; for the young hairs, every one growing straight out of the head, wounded his mother and his nurse like needles. They were too hard to be cut with a razor, and the smith who filed them off had to wear gauntlets while he was about his work. But the more the hair of The Man's son was filed, or trimmed with nippers, the more it grew to be stiff. At the age of five, each hair of his head was about as long, as thick, and sharp as a large darning-needle. At the age of ten, by an accident that would have been the death of any other boy, he fell, head foremost, from the top of the clock-tower of his father's palace into the paved court below. The ends of his hairs then ran to the very roots through the marble into the ground below, and his strong head buried itself in the pavement like a cannon ball, as far as the root of his nose, so that he remained with his legs flourishing in the air till he was uprooted, late at night, by machinery that had to be erected for that purpose over him. One or two of his hairs were broken, but he had not suffered the slightest bruise.

The rapid growth of the strong hair made it necessary that it should be daily trimmed. When whiskers, beard, and moustache had sprouted, every hair straight and strong as a corking-pin, in the same terrible fashion, no consideration of the fact that the more poor Rutifol's hair was trimmed the stiffer it would grow could excuse him for not using a hairdresser. His hair, therefore, was dressed every morning by four blacksmiths, on an anvil fitted up for the purpose in his Highness's dressing room. The Prince laid his strong head on the anvil, while his feebler body was stretched easily upon a sofa. The anvil was arranged in the place of the sofa-pillow. The four blacksmiths then, working together with all their might, tipped his hair with great sledge hammers, that broke down all the sharp points, leaving only an inch or two towards the root that could not be destroyed by hammering. When this was done they trimmed the rough hair neatly by filing the jagged ends. Yet this Prince with the Upright Hair had mild eyes under eyebrows that looked daggers; and he had lips that would have gladly kissed a wife if he could have given anybody one kiss without a thousand stabs.

Now, it was necessary to the well-being of Athyrium that Prince Rutifol should marry. Botrychio, his father, said so, and whatever The Man said was to be done had to be done quickly. Rutifol was himself the Coming Man, and after him there must be more to come, that could not come if Rutifol remained unmarried. So supreme was the inherent dignity of the Lord of Athyrium, that it could receive no addition from a wife's rank. The wife of the Man might be any woman in the world, born Empress or born rag-picker; once married to The Man, she became The Woman, and was at the topmost height of human glory. But of all women, the Maid Lunary was most disposed to marry Rutifol. Lunary was a noble damsel, with a fair face and long yellow hair, who dressed in pearls and silver every day of her life; and of all youths, it was

Rutifol who was most ready to marry her. "If you would but get rid of that stiff beard!" she said, when he declared his mind.

"Sweet maid," he answered, "I will wrap two feet of bolster round my hair whenever I come into your presence. You shall not have a scratch, though we live ninety years together."

"And how am I to sleep of a morning," Lunary asked, "when you are having your head dressed by the blacksmiths? No, my dear Rutifol, surely some oil can be found that will soften even hair like yours, and change its colour from that dismal iron-grey. I will engage myself to you only on condition that we marry when your chin is smooth."

Rutifol bowed assent. Raising Maid Lunary's hand, he guided her taper fingers carefully between the spikes of his beard and moustaches; it was a slender hand, and by opening his mouth to its utmost width, he could make room enough to advance the longest finger to one of his lips. This was the prettiest way he had of kissing her. The unmanageable part of his stiff beard was now so long that he could only feed himself by using a fork and spoon of more than ordinary length; and as he could bring no cup to his lips, he sucked through straw when he was thirsty. His head he covered night and day with a huge wadded turban; but the stiff porcupine beard would in no way be conquered or concealed. Prince Stiff-Beard, therefore, was the name by which poor Rutifol commonly went; they were only the wise people, who had more imagination for what was under his turban than eyes for what was under his nose, by whom he was known as the Prince with Upright Hair.

The Fairies know so much that they may have from the first been busy with their own devices to promote the growth of this young prince's hair. Certainly it was odd that when the scaly giant Cetarach caught the fairy Moonwort astride on a wild bee that was flying to the nest, which with his hard crocodile hands he was robbing of its honey, he should have replied as he did to her threats.—"Titania's subject, are you?" he said. "Her favourite dancer, eh? Well, henceforth you shall dance before me. See! I tie you by the leg to my waist-buckle, and there you may dance till I die. For your comfort let me tell you that I have a surprising constitution, and I like so well to see you twist and twirl, that I shall laugh and live the longer for your company."

"The Fairies will make war upon you," Moonwort said.

"Let them," said Cetarach. "I shall enjoy the sport of having others like yourself about me."

"I hope, though——"

"Don't hope, though. Let me be merciful and put you out of the pain of hoping. My good mother, Scolopender, boiled me with fennel and other herbs when I was a baby; with charmed herbs, over a charmed fire, in water that rained out of a cloud raised by enchantment. I don't know what the powers of herbs are, but you may rely upon it the good Scolopender knew; and she has told me many a time that I am charmed against every sort of death, unless it be death by the chin of a man who can kill me with one scrub of his beard. You see, little Miss, what a comfort it is to have you here and talk to you about myself. After she had gathered her herbs mamma did not notice that she dropped on the way a piece of Bristle Fern, which her cat brought to her in his mouth after I had been fished up out of the pot. It was not worth while to boil me again for charm against a risk like that. Do you think I look like a fellow to be killed with a single rub of a man's bristly chin?" Cetarach drew himself up to his full height, and stretched his scaly arms in triumph. His skin, from head to foot, was like the crocodile's.

At night, when Cetarach was asleep, Titania missed the beautiful court-dancer, Moonwort, from her ring. The bee she had ridden and the bees whom the giant robbed had been flying distracted up and down their wood—the same wood that was haunted by the Fairies. A stray Fairy had from the bees the fatal news upon her way to Court, and when it was told there, all the Fairies, with the bees for guides, flew to the monster's cave. But, alack the day, how powerless they were against him! They could not even tickle him so that he should twitch a finger in his sleep. Least of all could they unloose little Moonwort from the knot that tied her to the giant's waist-buckle.

Around Moonwort, wakeful prisoner, the bees and Fairies then assembled, to learn what she had to tell. But when she had told all, Titania laughed. Then all the Fairies laughed, because they knew that their queen's mirth betokened happiness; and Moonwort also laughed, well knowing that her mistress was not cruel.

"Here is a beautiful adventure," said her Majesty, "for that Prince Rutifol, whom they call Stiff-Beard. In how many days can a bee fly hence to Athyrium?"

"Sweet Sovereign, in ten."

Titania then whispered her message in the ear of Moonwort's bee and sent him off, but the whole swarm went with him as escort. At the end of ten days they came to the Court of Botrychio, where Rutifol, with a head and face like a porcupine's back, was in a pantry, with Maid Lunary, pounding together lard and almonds. That was a compound wherewith he had been advised to dress his head seven times a day. The bees, when they had flown thrice round his spiky hair, swarmed on the pestle. But Moonwort's bee soon rose again, and fluttering in the air close to his ear, hummed these words:—

"Rutifol, attend to me! Know why we have appeared!
Hard and scaly Cetarach, the son of Scolopender,
Gripes the little tender Moonwort. You are her defender!
Hard and scaly Cetarach you can lay upon his back,
And set the fairy dancer free, with one scrub of your beard."

When Stiff-Beard heard the name of Cetarach his hair lengthened and his beard seemed to grow stiffer. A strange instinct impelled him to leap up and strike his fist so fiercely on the table that the pestle jumped up out of the mortar, and the bees, all flying from it, rose again with a wild buzz into the air. Maid Lunary herself was scared away.

Now, as it happened that The Man's great black horse was at the door, Rutifol, hurrying out, leapt on its back. Being invited by the bees to follow them, he rode for ten days over moor and fell, through brook and river. He slept on his journey in the open air when it was dark, and breakfasted at daylight on the honey that the bees collected for him in the early dawn.

On the tenth day they had reached a frowning rock which overhung the sea. Then the Prince turned his horse into a meadow, and a dozen bees remained to watch it. Rutifol had come abroad to fight the giant in the same green velvet tunic and red satin body-clothes that he had on when he was pounding almonds with Maid Lunary. He had not so much as a court sword by his side; but then, to be sure, he had one of those heads that can fight its way through anything.

The sharp, loose stones of the mountain-side tore great holes in his gilt and jewelled slippers, as he struggled up. The sea widened before him; the opposite coast rose and spread into a far vision of opposite country. There were river meadows and sea marshes below him; the golden autumn plain and the great fairy-haunted forest that was but as one of the cloud shadows darkening its surface. All these were not many times larger than the eagle soaring over them, the flapping of whose near wings the climber heard. Beyond the plains, mountain surged over mountain; here in sunshine, there smeared with the falling darkness of a distant shower. The chill gust of the wind on the mountain height began to whistle through the Prince's teeth; but it would have blown them down his throat before it could have stirred one of the stiff, upright hairs upon his head and chin.

A turn in the path brought the Prince, who had been left by the bees, suddenly into the presence of the giant Cetarach. The monster looked like a great lizard in the figure of a man. His scales were of the same colour as the rock, and he was lying among the crags, with his feet dipped in a mountain tarn. His head was fixed and motionless as the head of a reptile at rest, but his eyes were intent on his waist-buckle; for there, set in the full rush of a draught of ice-cold mountain wind, the tender little Moonwort, with a string about her waist, was pirouetting.

When the tiny Fairy saw Rutifol scrambling up the rocks, she clapped her hands, and suddenly stood still to look at him. The giant, slowly moving one of his arms, pinched her, but she only answered with a little cry of joy. Cetarach then turned his head languidly to see what pleased her, and beheld—terrible sight!—a man unarmed, fighting against the wind, that had already torn some of his silk clothes into shreds; yet making his way slowly up, with a fierce head, on which the rigid hair stood all upright and motionless. Upon his chin the stranger bore the terror of ten thousand lances.

"Oh, Mother Scolopender! was this danger possible?" the monster cried. "But you shall dance for me still. Do not exult yet, little prisoner! Know that I bear a charmed life, and can fly where none may follow." Confident in this thought, Cetarach climbed a fresh height of the mountain, and paused at the edge of a deep stony chasm, where the great hills had been cleft from head to foot. Into that gulf Rutifol saw him leap; and into the same gulf Rutifol, when he had reached its edge, fearlessly flung himself head foremost. Cetarach had indeed been charmed in the caldron against hurt from broken bones, but Stiff-Beard knew well that he had only to fall on his head to be secure from hurt by any sort of tumble. The rock on which the Prince fell was so hard that the hard tips of his hair, instead of piercing it, rebounded from it, casting him up again into the sky. Four times he thus rebounded, and at each stroke of his hair on the flint there was so much fire struck that lightning seemed to flash through the dark chasm.

Then the giant, arming each of his great scaly claws with a ton's weight of rock, began to beat about Rutifol's head; and having caught the head between the two stones, tried to grind it into powder. It was well for the Prince that the stupid monster had not tried a blow upon his body before beating him off his legs with a stroke on the whisker, that assisted the leap up at his own throat. There, when he had a firm gripe on the giant's neck, with one scrape of his beard he scratched his head off.

When the head fell, there of course ran out of it all the knowledge and the ignorance it had contained. The ignorance rushed out as a black mist that filled the whole ravine, making the air so dark that it was not easy for Stiff-Beard to grope his way to Cetarach's waist-buckle. At last he found it, and felt that already the string was broken, and the fairy gone. "Well," he thought, with a shrug of his shoulders, "now it is my turn to be helped." He could not climb out of the abyss through that black darkness, so he felt his way back to the giant's scaly head, and when he had found that, sat upon it to await the rescue that he knew would come.

It came, but not at once. Rutifol had been waiting for some hours, when a point of light far above him struck, like the beam of a star through the night by which he was surrounded. It broke into rainbow colours that defined clearly the tiny figure of the Fairy King, who was placing on his bow an arrow tipped with a sharp point of blinding light. And when he shot that arrow through the darkness of the gulf, the dense mist broke into a million of rainbows. The hanging gardens of the Fairies then were seen by the Prince, colouring the rugged peaks far overhead, and all that stirred in them, distant as they were, was to be perceived, through their own magical light, as distinctly as if they had been close at hand. By Oberon's side, in the middle of the gardens, sat Titania on piled cushions of rose-leaves. A host of Fairies gambolled on the yellow garden paths that seemed to have been gravelled with the dust of the queen lily. Merrily capering before the throne of Oberon was Moonwort, who led the queen's company of fairy dancers. The Prince, gazing up between the rainbows, watched her with delight, and beat quick time with his own big foot to her movements. Then he saw what seemed to be a dark army marching up to the gates of the fairy garden. It was the friendly regiment of bees hived in the fairy forest. Only Moonwort's bee was admitted to the royal presence, and upon his back Moonwort presently flew down to Rutifol. As she descended, all the Fairies turned their faces to look after her, and fix their eyes on her friend Stiff-Beard, who still sat upon the scaly head of Cetarach.

At that moment, the moon rising over the mountain-top, flooded the Prince with so much light, that he could see very clearly lying here and there the few bits of knowledge that had run out of Cetarach's head when it was scraped off. One of these lay at his feet. Idly he picked it up, and found it to be knowledge of the place in which lay hidden Scolopender's magic herbal. This was the book that had taught her all her secrets. While Rutifol turned the information over, Moonwort chimed in his ear, "Your fairy lover finds it above her wit to discover the way to cover your head with slender splendour, or render hair like spike tender. By hook or by crook in the magic book of Cetarach's engenderer, the mighty Scolopender, we must look."

"Ah!" said he, "I have just picked up the knowledge of that book's hiding-place. But then I cannot get at it without the key. The key is a drop of bat's blood, and there is here no bat's blood, unless Cetarach had bat's blood in his body."

"Oberon gave me the key, and here it is," said Moonwort, holding up the small bubble in which, as in a bag, she carried it. "Now show me the lock it is to fit."

"The drop must fall on the red toadstool, yonder."

Moonwort galloped her bee over the toadstool, and, bursting her bubble as she crossed it, let the drop of bat's blood sink into its crown. At once the rock below began to heave, and there sprang up a plant like a cactus, with thick leathery leaves, and each leaf spotted with words. The bee flew in and out among its foliage, while Moonwort read as she rode, until, having found what she looked for, she clapped hands, and read aloud this receipt—"For Softening a Stubborn Head of Hair."

"Take Half a Pound of the Bloom of the Plum,
Scraped from the Fruit with a Dainty Thumb;
From Nine A.M. until One o'clock strikes,
Let a Soft little Palm rub this into the Spikes."

Having read this aloud, the fairy broke into gay laughter, and fluttered back through all the rainbows to the Fairies, who were laughing with her. Presently she was to be seen dancing madly again before the fairy throne, with all her company of fairy dancers threading mazes round about her.

"I am mocked," thought Rutifol; "yet she is provokingly pretty, and all is to be forgiven for such dancing!" Although he had been sitting down that cleft in the heart of the mountain from midday until midnight, the Prince only cared to keep his eyes fixed on the fairy gardens, and to watch the twirling of the fairy dancer whom he had set free. But Oberon, at last, putting his horn to his lips, sounded a low, musical note, that Stiff-beard closed his eyes to hear. All sense that there might have been of hunger or fatigue passed out of his frame, and he seemed to be gliding with the sound, in perfect happiness, he knew not whither. As the sense of the music became fainter, the sense of the gliding became very distinct. For Stiff-Beard, opening his eyes again, saw that he was, in truth, sailing down a broad, smooth river, in an ivory boat, with the light night-wind flapping in her silken sails, and the full moon silvering the ripples in her wake. The black horse of Botrychio his father, on which he had ridden forth, was littered down in a state cabin, that seemed to have been fitted up for him with a jewelled rack and golden manger. There were no sailors on board; but the rudder knew its work.

For this was the river that flowed through the great city, and by the many-towered palace of The Man; and as the sails furled themselves, the boat stood still abreast of the marble road that led up to the palace yard. Rutifol had not time to wish for a broad plank between the boat and shore before the black horse came out of his stall to cross a little bridge that rose out of the water, and seemed, like the water, to be silver. The horse, having passed over this bridge, walked in the direction of the stables, and was neighing up the ostler, before Stiff-Beard, having shaken off his sense of being in a dream, had leapt to shore. Then, when he had quitted it, the ivory boat, without losing its daintiness of form, shrank to the size of a cockle-shell, and seemed to have a straw for mast, with sails of gossamer. Rutifol believed that he saw Moonwort on board, dancing at him.

When the most noble Botrychio awoke next morning, it was told him that his son, who had been absent eleven days, was now returned. The Prince, therefore, was sent for; and, coming into his father's presence with hair as Upright as ever, told him all that had happened, and how he had come home with a sure receipt for softening his stubborn head of hair:—

"Take Half a Pound of the Bloom of Plum,
Scraped from the Fruit with a Dainty Thumb;

From Nine A.M. until One o'clock strikes,
Let a Soft little Palm rub this into the Spikes."

"Here," said the Maid Lunary, when the receipt had been written down and read at Court—"here are two things to be done. I claim to be the first to serve my future husband, let who will be the second. The first of the two things to be done it is my privilege to do.—Ho, page! go order me ten baskets of plums with the bloom on."

Plums were brought. The Maid Lunary dressed for the occasion; and with her sleeves daintily tucked up, rubbed her thumb over plum after plum, and wiped the bloom off very easily. But when the bloom was rubbed from all the plums, she had got nothing of it but a faint little suggestion of dirt upon her fingers. "Order more plums!" she cried. More plums were brought. She rubbed at plums all the day long, and her success was, that by night-fall, she had a most decided stain of dirt upon her thumb. But there was nothing to put into the half-pound porcelain jar, with which the proper quantity of bloom was to be measured. "We are mocked!" she cried. "Prince with the Upright Hair, I wash my hands of you." So she left the jar standing in the marble court of the palace, in the midst of the heaps of plums over which she had been rubbing her thumb, and went to bed in a sad pet.

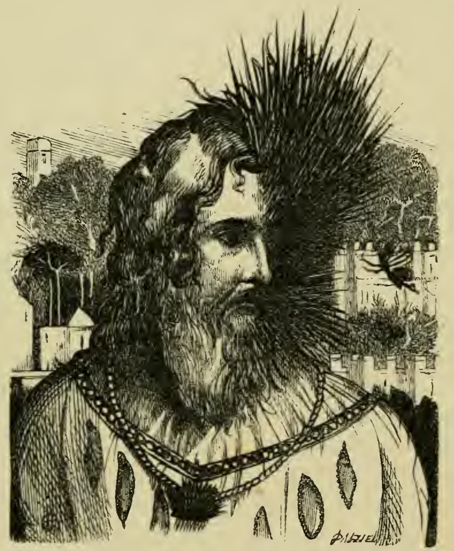
Rutifol also went to bed, and dreamt that he saw Moonwort dancing between the boughs of all the plum-trees in the world, scraping, with fairy thumb, the bloom from all their fruit; and whenever she had collected her own tiny hand full, throwing it into the laps of other Fairies, who flew to and fro. When the moon had reached that part of the sky from which her direct light went through the Prince's window and struck on his pillow, he was roused, and tumbled out of bed with a sleepy desire to know whether the Fairies really were at work for him. But he was wide awake in an instant when, on looking down into the court-yard, he saw Moonwort's company of dancers capering round the porcelain pot, while there was a constant flying to and fro of little fairies, who seemed to be transacting business inside it.

"Kind little Moonwort!" Stiff-Beard sighed. "What an active wife you will be for somebody!"

In the morning there was half a pound of plum-bloom in the jar, exact to a hair's weight; and how it got there, only Stiff-Beard knew. He told his father privately, but kept the secret from the people. Then the Maid Lunary was called upon, as some one else had taken out of her hands the preparation of the hair-powder, to claim her right of rubbing it into the Prince's head.

"But I've washed my hands of this whole business," she said. None of her attendant ladies and no lady of the Court would offer, with her soft little palm, from nine in the morning until one o'clock struck, to rub the balm into those frightful spikes. His Highness The Man at last declared that there was only one course left to him. So he proclaimed that any person who, with a hand of the required softness, would apply the balm to the Prince's head in the required manner, should, if a man, take half his possessions; if a woman, take his son. "I wish you an old crone to wife," said the Maid Lunary to Rutifol.

And it seemed likely that her wish would come to pass. Rutifol sat, every morning, by the porcelain pot in the court-yard, with his head bare, ready for any helping hand; and not a hand was offered, until after many days there came into the yard an old crone who was very wrinkled, though not very ugly. She had bright eyes, and a white soft chin; but she was bald, toothless, deeply wrinkled, and bent nearly double by the weight of years. Her wrinkled hand was small and wonderfully soft; there could be no doubt that she might claim her right to risk its skin upon the spikes of Rutifol's head, if she chose to do so. She did choose to do so; and the Maid Lunary rejoiced; but the Prince was not sorry, for he understood the fun that he saw in his old friend's eyes. "Surely, you are an old friend?" he said, as the crone dipped her hands into the porcelain pot and rubbed them together. "Nobody would call me a young friend," she answered; and he was sure, by some far-away ring in her cracked voice, that this was Fairy Moonwort, playing tricks upon him.



At the first stroke of nine, the old woman began to rub the plum-bloom over Rutifol's head, beard, and whiskers. The points of the hairs bent under her hands, and Lunary was very much disposed to take her work from her, when she saw that there was no real danger in it. But The Man held firmly by the promise he had given. All the Ministers of State were assembled in the sunny court-yard under the clock-tower; The Man himself sitting under the shade of the great columned portico, surrounded by the carved emblems of Justice that led into his great audience-hall. At noon, the Prince's hair flowed over his shoulders in soft ringlets, and his beard was like fine silk. A question was then raised by the old woman while she rubbed—Was it required that she should carry out the terms of the prescription to the letter? Rutifol's hair already was soft, and she believed the head itself had now begun to soften. But the august Man having declared that when anything that has to be done is not done to the letter, worse evil than can be dreaded from fulfilment of the duty is sure to arise from neglect of it, the old woman rubbed on. Yet it was evident that, before one o'clock struck, the unnatural hardness of Rutifol's head would be subdued into softness like that of the hair now flowing over it in glossy ringlets. The Prince's head bent, indeed, already under the touch, and when one o'clock struck, he jumped to his feet with faultless hair and beard, and so soft-headed that his skull could be squeezed like a sponge. But the strength that had gone out of his head seemed to have been forced down into his legs, for he was unable to keep them still, even in the majestic presence of his father. and he not only shuffled, beat time, and cut small, unexpected capers, but occasionally took upright leaps, twinkling his feet while he did so in a way that astonished all the courtiers.

"What was to be done, is done. But that my son's condition is improved," The Man said, "I will not undertake to say; or that it will be improved, my good woman, when you have married him. What is your age?"

"Nine hundred and seventy-three come next May-day," the good woman replied.

"Oh yes, I know," said Rutifol; "and you are Moonwort. Fairies are very long lived. I will be yours."

"And I am yours," she said. "It is true that I am Moonwort. Nevertheless, like weds only with like. Either

I must become a woman, as you see, with my years upon me, to live as a Princess here; or you must become a Fairy as I am, to dance with me before Titania."

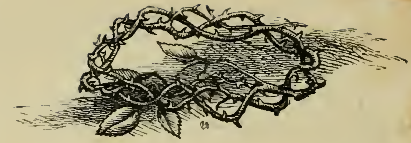
"What say you, father?" asked the Prince, bounding with joy into the sky, and falling into an imposing attitude of supplication upon one of his great toes.

"It is not for me, son, to control your destiny. A man must do what he can best do. You had a gifted head, and did with it the work it had to do. Now, it appears that you have highly-gifted legs."

"Then, O father, it must be, now that my head is soft, my destiny to dance. Yes, I will be a Fairy with you, Moonwort. Principal male dancer at the Court of Oberon, and such a wife to dance with! Destiny of destinies!"

The Man would have sighed aloud had not a gay strain of soft music then arising drowned the sigh in his heart, and brought smiles to his face. The courtiers all smiled, the Maid Lunary laughed, and everybody presently began snapping fingers in tune with the music. Then all the grosser parts of Rutifol burst into air with a loud explosion, the old woman vanished, and the most exquisite of little Fairy men was to be seen waltzing out of the Court with the merriest and loveliest of little Fairy women. As they twirled themselves out of sight, the fairy music followed them, till it was out of hearing.

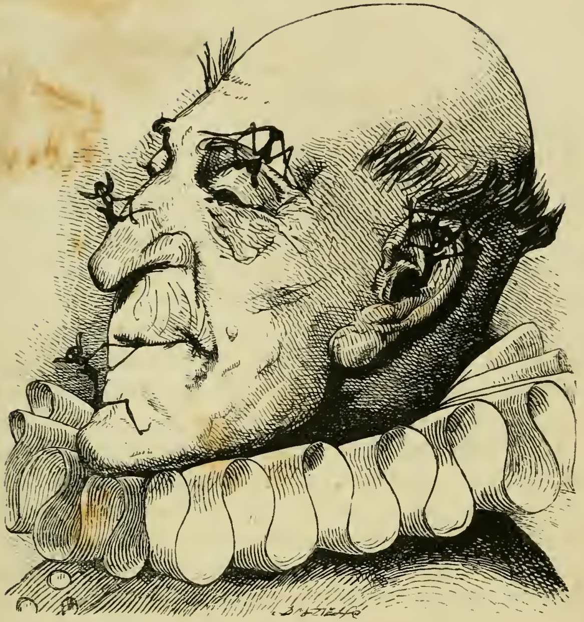
It was heard again, though, after midnight, when it floated The Man out of his bed, and wafted him to his son Fol's (the Prince had left part of his name behind him), to Fol's wedding in Fairy-land. There he saw what a fine thing it is to be principal dancer to the Fairy Sovereigns. The greatest of potentates having come home at dawn from his son's wedding, got up out of bed at breakfast-time, perfectly satisfied. He had seen his son well settled. He had obtained also a treaty of commerce with Puck, from which he expected great advantages to the State.



THROUGH THE ROSES.

Near Bethlehem, says an old traveller, there is a field called Floridus, in which the first roses appeared. A fair maiden, falsely blamed, was there to suffer in the flames, and she looked up to Heaven when the fire was burning round about her. Then the faggots that were burning became red rose-bushes, and those that were not kindled became white rose-bushes, full of the first roses that men ever saw.

That is no bygone marvel. Fair or wrinkled, fresh or withering, some woman or man is known to each of us, who has looked up to Heaven from a martyr fire, and of whom people little suffering and much complaining say, "This neighbour of ours may well smile, whose way of life is through the roses."



THE CLEAR HEAD.

At the Court of Grig the Thirty-ninth, nobody was in more credit than the Marquis Polypody. He was a stately man, with a conical bald crown, and a great concave nose. When he spoke his lips worked soberly, they never played. There was no person alive to whom the Marquis Polypody ever had betrayed his thoughts. His was too clear a head for that.

The Marquis Polypody's head was clear of brains, and from the walls of its empty cave reverberated the opinions of whatever person might at any moment happen to address him. But the reverberation had in it a sonorous rumble, giving it an air of great originality.

His Lordship always kept an even countenance. All who were about him, except the mere jokers of the Court, were flattered by the very serious way in which he received, as if it were a matter of great moment, any sort of communication made within his hearing. Jokers, indeed, were disposed to laugh at this, but dared not. Who was so happy as the poet, when he was allowed to dedicate his idleness to the clear-headed Marquis Polypody? Such a name prefixed to his vain dreamings gave them an air of reality. The man of science gladly recognised the value of his own discoveries when his hope that they might serve his country rumbled back upon him from within the cavernous head of the great Marquis, as a positive assurance that his country was much served by his discoveries. As for negotiation, at that he was admitted to be first in the known world. He could handle a napkin or receive a snuff-box irreproachably. He could negotiate an empty peace, with the deliberation that would give it value. He could baffle the acutest of ambassadors who sought to find out what he knew. For he had the sublime way of knowing nothing, creakily and slowly, that enables its possessor to look blandly down on the possessor of mere every-day wisdom, that moves cheerily with an undignified brisk trot.

During many reigns the palace occupied by Grig the Thirty-ninth had been infested by a swarm of Fairies. They were good-natured, but inconveniently frolicsome. It pleased them to be on too familiar terms with the King and the high officers of the Court, and to disturb business with ill-timed freaks of folly. Grig the Thirty-eighth had ordered all those parts of the palace which were supposed to be the special haunts of these meddlesome creatures to be closed, and in the other chambers and halls he had hung every object to which power was ascribed of offending the good people and driving them away. They did not take offence, for it was not their humour; but they were really in want of a hole to creep into that they could call their own.

One day, two little Fairies, Aspid and Lastrea, chasing one another, ran into the caverns of the Marquis Polypody's nose, and found how they communicated with the greater cavern of his head. Away therefore they ran to report to their comrades that the Marquis's head had nothing at all in it, and that the fine large cave under his skull afforded room enough to lodge them all. Then all the Fairies ran together to the hole which had thus been found for them.

The Marquis Polypody chanced to be at supper with the King, in the King's private cabinet, courteously returning to him his opinions in the form of counsel, when, through all the gates of his senses—eyes, nose, ears, and mouth—there happened the grand rush of Fairies to the cave under his skull. The elfin people, full of glee when they perceived its airiness and roominess, abandoned themselves to mad gambolling, and brushed violently and continually against the pia mater lining their apartment.

The poor Marquis! His Majesty was on the point of tears over the story of a pressure put upon him by his subjects, that was inconsistent with his kingly dignity, when the bewildered statesman, leaning back in his chair, said—

"Cheer up, Grig!"

"My Lord?" stammered his Majesty.

"Cheer up! Take another glass of wine.

"Behave as a Grig!
Dash off your wig!
Any pig may be big,
But a fig for the Grig
Who don't chirp! chirp! chirp! chirp! chirrup!

"Conduct the Marquis Polypody to his own apartments," the King said to the attendants. "His mind," he thought, "has been overtaxed by State affairs. I will send my physician to him."

But an Elf who had peeped through one of my Lord's eyes reported what was passing to her friends inside. The Fairies then all ceased their tumbling, and while Aspid rushed away to tickle the King, cunning Lastrea whispered words that rumbled gently out of the Clear Head.

"Forgive me, Sire. There was, a minute ago, a sudden whirling in my head, that has now passed away. I never before felt it. While it lasted, I seem to have been mad. But now I am again your faithful and respectful servant."

Aspid was sitting in the royal ear.

"Rest yourself, my Lord Polypody," said the King, with an affectionate smile, as he dismissed the man in waiting. "You work too hard in our service. The whirlpool in your head, I think, my Lord, brought me up one of your deep thoughts in a wild way. We might be merrier, without being less wise. See now, my wig is laid aside. What say you, my Lord? Shall we chirp?"

Thereupon, King and statesman sat over the fire together cosily, and the good little Fairies, who had a mind to maintain the credit of the house they occupied, poured so much frank and earnest talk out of the statesman's head, that Grig the Thirty-ninth took leave of him with an embrace, and declared that he would hold a Cabinet Chirp with him three times a week.

When my Lord the Marquis went to bed, the kind little creatures in his cranium amused themselves with acting dainty dreams for his amusement. There was a tone of friendliness about them all that gave a perfectly new sort of movement to his lips when, in the morning, he sat at his breakfast with the Marchioness, and with his son and daughter.

"Wife," he said to the Marchioness, "it will be late before we meet again. What if we chatter as we did when we were young?"

The Marchioness opened her eyes very widely, for my Lord usually buried his nose at breakfast-time in a big book that was one of his properties.

"Husband," she answered, "if you have leisure, and are well disposed, I wish you would hear what our son Felix there must, sooner or later, tell you."

The Fairies crowded to both eyes of the Lord Polypody, and looked out of them as the son spoke, while a swarm of Fairies took possession of his Lordship's tongue, ready to manage it when fit occasion came. The Fairies looking out of my Lord's eyes, gave them so gentle an appearance that the boy spoke from his heart.

"I have gone astray, dear father," he said; "have found at the Court evil counsellors, and am in debt; in the toils also of false friends. I looked for you, sometimes, when you have been busy, or have seemed to be so far above my foolishness, that I dared not open my soul to you; but now——"

Here the Fairies began working the great tongue.

"Now, my boy, you find that your father is of one clay with yourself, stiff with a few more years of age, but of one piece with you. To whom shall a son look for a partner in his proud and happy thoughts, to whom on earth shall he go for help in trouble, if not to his father? When you get a wife, I will yield up to her the place of counsellor and comforter; now, I divide it with your mother, boy. Speak to us fearlessly as to the people you may trust with all your mind. Why, fellow, we must needs love you, though you were the vilest upon earth!"

"Henceforth, father, my soul is open to you," said the youth.

"Take my confidence, also, papa, while you are about it," said the daughter, Aemula. "I had agreed to run away to-morrow with the young lord Gymnogram, because I cannot marry your old friend the Marquis Polystick."

"Polystick is an ass, my dear," said the complaisant father. "Do not run away with Gymnogram, because he also is an ass. But marry neither."

"That is what I should like best," the daughter said.

"Exactly so," said his Lordship. "Folly in me set on foot folly in you. Wait till an honest man shall love you, my dear Aemula; then make your father comfortable by accepting him."

"My dear," said the Marchioness to her husband, "some whisper arose in the palace from the servants' hall, about a touch of madness that appeared in you last night when dining with the King. Are you quite sure you are yourself this morning?"

"More myself than I have been for years," said Polypody.

"Then," said his wife, "I also am more yours than I have been for years."

When the Marquis Polypody retired to his study, and would write, there sat a Fairy over the mouth of his ink-bottle.

"Out of the way, little mischief," he said, "or I shall dip my pen through you."

"Do," said the Fairy.

"You are quite in earnest about that."

"Quite."

So my Lord Polypody's pen passed through the Fairy Marattin, on its way into the ink-bottle, and the little creature took no stain when it came through him again on its way back full of ink.

But where now were the long State sentences he used to write? Had he quite lost the power of producing documents? Sentences, once as long as his whole body, could to-day be measured by his thumb. It was clear to him that if he wrote in this way, no more would be said about his head. "A child could understand this!" he cried, in despair, as he put his pen down.

"Not content?" asked the Fairy. "Will it not do to have your words jump straight out of your thoughts?"

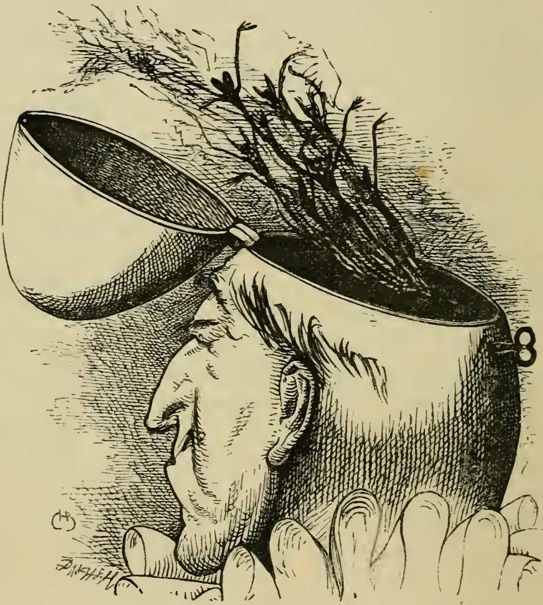
The Fairy rose from the ink-bottle, and buzzed like a fly about the shelves. Instantly the Lord Polypody was attacked on all sides, by the firing of great round words at him, out of holes in the backs of his books. The books of the sweet singers of his land, and of the wise and witty of old time, with a fair number that his neighbours had written, were all quiet and unbroken. But there were still batteries of volumes that hailed words about his head. In five minutes the storm was over, and the bindings were all whole again; but many of the works had shrunk to a third, or even to a twentieth of their old size.

"Now, my Lord Marquis," said Marattin, "read your books, and learn of them. The wordiness is gone, the repetitions are all gone, the affectations are all gone. No sage will impose on you with dulness, in the name of profound thought. No jester will ask you to laugh, except when he has really gladness of his own to share. Your books of fancy have spat out all the dull metaphors, and retain only those which were born of the life within a writer's mind."

The company in Polypody's head had all been looking out at the performance of their comrade, and when it was over left their windows to plunge into a dance of which the measure tingled down into the Lord Marquis's legs. But he restrained himself. Standing up with his back to the fire, he was drumming a minuet tune with his toes upon the rug when his wife entered. Then he forgot his years and kissed her as he would have kissed her thirty years ago. Off went the Fairies in their dance again, and now the

Marquis took his lady by the hand, and still humming his own music, fairly set her to dance with him in his minuet.

Here was, indeed, good sport for all the playfellows. They gave themselves up to it joyously, and manned so cleverly the outworks of their cavern, that the Marquis very soon found love and trust thrust on him from every side. Men and women of all ranks and in all forms of difficulty came to him with unsealed lips asking for human sympathy and counsel.

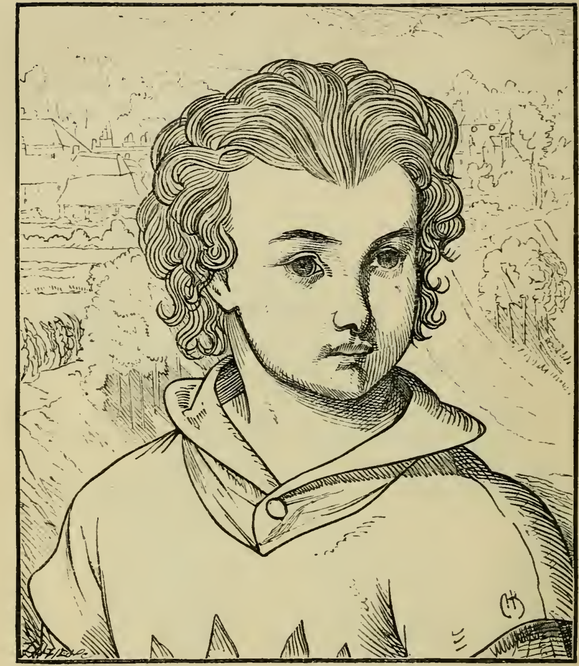


But it happened that the daily stir of the Fairies in the Marquis Polypody's empty skull, tickling the pia mater, produced from it a development of brain. The brain grew and began to fill his head. At last it pressed so much upon the colony by which that cavern had been held, that Aspid and Lastrea were sent out to look for a new place of settlement. And Polypody's brains continued to encroach on them so rapidly, that even before they knew where next they were to settle, all the Fairies flew away.

The Sower.

Though his heart may dare to glory,
Conscious of a God innate,
Yet to read his future story,
To foresee his future fate,
To fore-sing his future singing
Never shall the poet heed:
Every day to him is bringing

All whereof the day hath need:
Faithful is his heart and fearless.
Wholesome seed, he knoweth well,
May be sown when all is cheerless,
But will spring up where it fell.
Seed was given to his keeping,
And from heaven it was sent.
He has sown it; is it sleeping
In the soil, he is content.



THE CUNNING OF SISSOO.

CHAPTER I.

SISSOO KILLS DRAGONS.

In a cottage by a brook-side, at the foot of a small wooded hill, there lived a boy whose name was Sissoo. All his relations who were not dead were abroad, so that he was quite alone, and had to keep himself as he best could. Since he was twelve years old, that was not difficult.

Sometimes he worked on farms. Oftener, because he was a wonderfully clever lad, he went out for a day's housework where there was something to be contrived that puzzled village wit. Many a day's work he got by his toy-making. For, between six in the morning and six in the evening, with no other tool than his four-bladed pocket-knife, he would turn a ball of string and a billet of wood into so many wonderful playthings, that a family of children was supplied with a month's joy whenever the wise elders had been hiring Sissoo for a day's work in the nursery. If a lock was hampered, if the bucket was lost in the well, if the mouse that ate the cheese would not be caught, or if a child cried for an hour and was not to be quieted, the first thought of everybody within reach of Sissoo was that Sissoo should be sent for. There was no sort of lock that Sissoo could not pick. Sissoo was deeper than any well, slyer than any mouse, and so full of merry tricks, that he could set the most miserable child laughing in half a minute.

As he earned quite enough to keep himself, and was clever enough to do harder things than wait upon himself, Sissoo lived alone in the small cottage by the brook-side. There he is now to be seen, cutting a block of wood for some wonderful purpose into a great litter of chips, while the evening sunshine slanting through his lattice lights up his fresh rosy cheek, and brings into light the threads of gold in his brown hair. He works with stout hard hands that have already done more than their share of labour. He is a robust, healthy, cheery lad, singing to himself while he slices, snips, and chips.

But he leaves off singing, when there comes a knock at his door. Jumping from his bench, he runs to open to a stranger, who stands in the porch under its great festoons of roses. This is a tall gentleman in a violet velvet cloak, lined with indigo satin, thrown gracefully over his shoulders, partly covering the blue velvet tunic richly trimmed and bordered with green silk, below which are his legs handsomely dressed in yellow breeches, orange stockings, and red shoes. The gentleman has a diamond star on his breast, an enormous gold chain round his neck, and a court-sword by his side hilted with emeralds and rubies. He has a hat, to which a bunch of cock's-feathers is fastened by a bunch of many-coloured jewels, jauntily set over a broad fair face more than half covered with a jungle of pale hair. He balances between two fingers a riding-whip, and his piebald horse, gaily caparisoned, is being walked up and down the road by a magnificent plum-coloured groom.

"Aw-yaw wan Sissoo liv-ya?" asked his Magnificence, who drawled in the Hawbawyaw dialect of his native tongue, the object of which is to give an impression that the speaker aspires to be honoured as a blank in creation, having nothing in his head and nothing on his hands.

"I'm Sissoo," said the boy. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"Want-ya," said the Court splendour. "Aw-waw-tha's Ma'sty wants-ya kil-sm wums."

"Will you have the goodness to repeat that?" said Sissoo.

"Aw-aim a stick, go'stick and King's Mazinjaw."

"Do you mean that his Majesty, King Calabash the Second, who lives yonder at the big house in Hairgrass, has heard of me, and wants me for a day's job?"

"Yaws, t'kill wums."

"To kill worms!"

The King's messenger, taking more time than we can spare in repeating it over the delivery of his errand, at last gave Sissoo to understand that his cleverness at odd jobs had been talked about at Court, and that he was wanted by the King to kill twelve worms, which were, in fact, dragons. They lived in a cave near Hairgrass; and, roaming abroad in search of food, ate up any man, woman, or child they met, that did not look tough or unwholesome.

"It is only sunset," said Sissoo, "and we are at Hair-grass in two hours, if you take me up behind you. I've Mother Jonquil's roof to mend to-morrow. Next day I'm engaged to make a puppet-show for Polly Daisy. The day after that is booked by Father Kelp, who wants some notion of a way I have of putting seeds into the ground. On Saturday I've promised to mind Widow Dewberry's house for her, while she's away. I'd better do the King's job now, to-night. Jump up, my lord, and let me ride behind you!"

"Bsud!" said the messenger.

"Absurd, is it? Then, by your leave, I'll ride alone. Your groom is mounted; you can ride with him," said Sissoo, as he galloped away on the messenger's horse, and left him with his mouth and eyes wide open, vacantly fingering his sandy beard.

So Sissoo rode to Court, made his own way to the presence of King Calabash, when access was denied him, and found his Majesty, who was depressed by a severe cold, eating gruel for his early supper. A tallow candle, on a rich gold salver, was at his elbow, and six footmen were waiting to apply the tallow to his royal nose.

"What boy is this who intrudes on us?" the King asked.

"You sent for Sissoo," answered the boy, "and here I am. I've no time but to-night for that job of the dragons. Besides, if they eat people every day, whatever I can do I ought to do before to-morrow."

"Well," said King Calabash, "if you are as clever as you are bold, I pity the dragons. But if not, I pity you. If you destroy those worms, their treasure is yours. There are twelve of them, and they must have a hundred wagon-loads of gold hid in their cave. If they destroy you, they will crunch your bones."

"I don't think much of dragons," said Sissoo. "But if I kill them, will you send their treasure after me? I cannot stop to see about it, because I must be at Mother Jonquil's before seven to-morrow morning. But, by-the-by, I shall want a horse to take me back."

"I will give you the fleetest horse out of my stable," said the King. "It shall stand, saddled for you in the court-yard; but it will only be given to you in exchange for the tails of the twelve dragons, which you must produce as evidence that they are dead. Every ounce of the treasure also, if the dragons are killed by to-morrow morning, I will cause to be delivered at your door. What arms will you take, boy?"

"Only the two that belong to me," Sissoo replied. "Ten fingers, a head, and a pocket-knife are twelve to twelve against the monsters."

So Sissoo was taken to the dragon's cave, and left in the midst of dark night at the mouth of it. He peeped in, and all was dark; by which he knew that the beasts were asleep; for, had only one of them been awake, the blaze of his eyes would have made the cave as light as day. There were a dozen light flickerings of a dull red flame at one end of the cave, which Sissoo rightly took to be the breath out of the dragons' mouths.

He climbed down without making any noise, and found the huge creatures all asleep in a heap together over the bones of their supper. As they lay in a heap snoring, with their mouths half open, each of them made a noise like the firing of a ship's guns through the whistle of a storm at sea.

"Oh, dear me," said Sissoo, when he got down into the cave. "This little business need not detain me long."

He slipped among the dragons, who could be aroused by nothing short of a noise more terrible than their own snoring, and as they lay coiled together, Sissoo lifted very carefully and gently all the ends of their long serpent tails, till he had laid the tip of every dragon's tail across his neighbour's teeth. Then he rolled a big lump of stone down the mouth of the oldest of the dragons, and immediately scrambled up to the mouth of the cave again.

The stone having got into the big dragon's throat, stuck there, and soon began to choke and rouse him. He coughed, he lashed his tail, of which the end was immediately bitten off; he snapped his teeth, and doing so, snapped off the end of the tail of his neighbour, who ran forward between sleeping and waking, and bit fiercely at the end of the tail that he found running like a lance over his tongue. Every dragon soon woke up horribly cross, twisting with pain, because the tip of his tail was bitten off, and upon opening his eyes saw the dragon nearest to him spitting a tail-end, which he took to be his own, out of his mouth.

A desperate fight of dragon against dragon then ensued, of which the clamour was heard in the city of Hairgrass. King Calabash, though he had taken a sedative draught after his gruel, was aroused by it, and said to his Queen, "What a night of it that boy is making with the dragons!" "I'm sure," said the Queen, "he must have made them very angry. If he is killing them, I wish he could contrive to go about his work more quietly."

Nobody in Hairgrass slept until the noise of screaming, blowing, and yelling was all over. When the dragons had fairly destroyed one another, Sissoo went down and collected the ends of their tails which they had bitten off for him, and carrying them to the palace court, exchanged them for the swift horse that was to bear him to his day's work over Mother Jonquil's thatch.

CHAPTER II.

SISSOO VANQUISHES A GIANT.

For the next fortnight there was a continual delivery of sacks of gold at Sissoo's door, because the King was mindful of his promise, and took care to send him every ounce of the dragons' hoard. Now there lived hard by, in a castle as large as a hundred mountains, the tall Giant Cormier, who was so big that his head was always damp with the clouds hanging about his hair. But he was not too tall to stoop to a mean theft, and when Cormier saw how many sacks of gold were crammed into Sissoo's little house, till there was only one room left that was not as full of it as an autumn barn is full of corn, Sissoo, who knew him to be a thief, took notice that his fingers twitched whenever he went by. The boy, whose cunning had destroyed twelve dragons at one stroke, was not to be offended rashly, even by a giant. Cormier did not venture upon force. "If I can pilfer a few sacks," he thought, "by opening the large window of that back room, through which I think I can get my hand, I daresay they will not be missed."

But Sissoo, who saw him looking hungrily and often at that window, sent a little of his gold to town, and bought with it a ton of the strongest Hachah snuff. This excellent snuff takes a man quite off his legs whenever it makes him sneeze. Covering his nose with sponge, Sissoo carefully filled all the gold-sacks near the large back-window with the light dust of the snuff, putting gold pieces on the tops and at the sides. Then he took care to leave the window just a little open, and locking up his house, hid in the bushes of the brook. As soon as it was dusk, he saw the giant's head peeping over the hill. Cormier spied out the unguarded window. Nobody stirred in or near the house. His golden opportunity, the giant thought, was come. Stretching a long arm across the hillside, he slipped his fingers in upon his prize, and carried off the first ten sacks on which they laid their clutch.

But when the giant got back to his castle, and had locked himself up in his private room, he shook the bags to empty their contents out on the floor and count his gain. Then out there came a cloud of Hachah, snuff of snuffs, that got into his nose. At the first sneeze he blew all the glass out of his windows, and a fresh eddy of snuff was raised up as the wind rushed in. At the second sneeze, Cormier was lifted from his legs and knocked against the ceiling with such force that the whole castle shook. By the third sneeze he was blown through the substance of his own door and embedded in the wall beyond, where one sneeze more rent the wall in which he was fixed, so that a great part of the castle fell and buried him under its ruins.

What remained of the castle was Sissoo's by right of conquest, and the boy moved into it with all his treasures.

CHAPTER III.

SISSOO OUTWITS AN ENCHANTER.

Sissoo now worked among his villagers for love and not for money, but he was as brisk and useful as he had been from the first, and kind as ever to all children younger than himself. The children of the village used to come and play about his castle when they liked, and the old people ate and drank in it when they liked, while Sissoo laboured every day for somebody, and would go out for a long day's work with his pocket-knife as often as he had done when his life depended on his earnings.

One day an old man came to him, who said that he had just taken a house in the village, where he had heard everybody talk about the cunning of Sissoo and his kindness in helping any of his neighbours. Would he mind coming to help a feeble old fellow, who had to put his house in order? There was a great deal to be done in it, and he was very poor. Certainly, Sissoo said, he could come. The very next day he was free to come, so on the next day he went.

Sissoo quite understood that for an old man who has a new house to settle into there are a great many little matters to be done, and as he had only that day to spare, he went to his work so early that it was not even sunrise when he reached the cottage to which he had been directed. When he came near the door he heard mewing inside. The door was opened. While he stood still in the shadow of the porch a large cat came out, walking upon her hind legs like a lady, followed with civil bows by the old man himself. "Good-bye, Purslane," the enchanter (for he was an enchanter) said; "good-bye, and take care of yourself. I can perceive a strong smell of the dawn. Trust me to make a mouse of the lad before nightfall, for all his cunning! Never fear, Purslane; my nephew Cormier, whom you can't marry now, shall be avenged. Till after sunset, then, good-bye."

"Good-bye, Touch-me-not, good-bye, Touch-me-not," said Pussy, and no more was seen of her.

"Aha, old Touch-me-not!" said Sissoo to himself. "Did I get up too early for you? And are you quite sure that you will turn me into cat's-meat?" He waited half an hour before he tapped at the enchanter's door, and then the old man looked down upon him from an upper window, yawning as if he had just had his sleep disturbed.

"Is that the kind Sissoo already?" he said. "So early afoot to help his poor old neighbour Quickset!"

"Is your name Quickset?" asked the boy. "The name written upon your face is Touch-me-not."

"Quickset! Quickset it is!" mumbled the enchanter as he shut the window, and as he came down-stairs he rubbed his hand over his chin and cheeks and forehead. "Truly this boy," he thought, "will be too cunning for me if I do not mind. If he is sharp enough to see my name in my face, what else may he not read in it. I'd better pass a smear over the writing." So, as he passed the fireplace, he took up a handful of black ashes and wiped his face with them before opening the door.

"Why, What's-your-name!" Sissoo said, when the door was opened by the old man, and he saw the ashes on his face. "Why, What's-your-name, what a face you have! Where did you go to bed? I think you must have been sitting to-night with the cat."

The enchanter opened and shut his eyes. "I must make short work," he thought, "with this terrible boy; and then he said, "I have been blowing the embers, Sissoo. My good boy must want his breakfast, and an old man's fit for nothing except cowering and pottering and cooking at the fire. I'll get our breakfast ready, my dear boy."

"No, go to bed again, till the day is a bit older. I'll go to work meanwhile, and be as quiet as a mouse. If you like, I'll make you a nice breakfast broth, and bring it you in bed. You must have pot-herbs in the house. There's an exceedingly strong smell of purslane."

"The boy's nose," thought the enchanter to himself, "is as sharp as his eyes, for it is nothing but the name of purslane that he smells. If I am to make a mouse of him, I must be cautious, and not let him catch me napping."

"Yes, my dear young friend," said Touch-me-not; "I have a good many herbs in my little pantry yonder. We poor people, who cannot afford much meat, are glad of the cheap green sauce that will make the little we eat savoury. I can brew delicious broths out of my pot-herbs; one of them is very soothing to the morning stomach, as you shall soon find, my dear. It takes trouble to make, but for you what would I not do?"

"And what shall I do for you, neighbour? Upon what shall I begin?"

"I'm a poor lone old man," said the enchanter, "and before everything I want to be well fastened in. I've had some iron bars, as you see, put across the window. I should like you to make sure for me that they are firm. And that lock's hampered, I think."

Sissoo soon proved the firmness of the bars. Nobody could get through the window; that was clear. The hampered lock was mended with a cunning poke or two from the smallest blade of Sissoo's four-bladed knife, and then the boy opened the big blade and said to the old man—

"Perhaps you don't know what a place this is for mice, and what a fellow I am at a mouse-trap. I'll make you a trap while you are picking and sorting all those herbs for your breakfast broth; and I know, too, how to prepare a piece of cheese so that no mouse living can resist the bait. What say you?"

"Good, very good," said the enchanter, and he chuckled to himself. "Clever boy, he shall run at his own bait! I'll catch him in his own trap, cunning as he is—in his own trap, his own trap."

So Sissoo chipped and dug about a lump of wood with his invaluable pocket-knife, twisted some bits of wire, and had his bait ready set by the time the enchanter's broth was mixed and the fire lighted under it. Sissoo had watched him narrowly, for that he meant to brew a charm he saw. He saw also, that in passing in and out for divers herbs and spices, Touch-me-not had contrived to lock on the other side two doors leading out of the room. Then, on the excuse of having gone out for some other herb into the garden, he had come in by the front-door and slily shifted the key to the outside.

"Sissoo, my dear," said the old man—and the boy's ears were sharp to detect the tremble of excitement, under tones meant to sound very careless—"for this broth to be good, it must boil well; and we shall want more wood under it. I've made the fire a little hotter than my poor old head can bear when I lean over it to stir the pot. Would you mind stirring for me while I go out for the wood?"

"Fetching wood is a boy's work," answered Sissoo. "You told me yourself that an old man was fit for nothing except cowering and cooking at the fire."

A slight hissing was heard at the bottom of the pot as it began to boil, and the enchanter, without answering, made suddenly a leap towards the outer door that he had purposely left open. But Sissoo, who had suspected what was brewing, was on the alert, and had chosen for himself a seat near the door. At once he jumped out, and snapped the latch-key so sharply on his enemy that he had almost caught him by the nose. Swiftly he turned the lock, and running to look in at the window, saw the enchanter with his arms spread beating against door after door, and then rushing towards the barred window. But as he ran, a thick steam rose out of the broth and hid him from the boy's eyes, for he never reached the window-bars to glare on Sissoo face to face. When the steam passed away and everything in the room was to be seen again, Touch-me-not was no longer there. But there was a mouse caught in Sissoo's cage, eagerly breakfasting upon the bait that no mouse could resist.

Sissoo unlocked the cottage door and went home to his breakfast. After sunset he watched near the cottage and saw the cat Purslane slink in at the door. One squeak was heard, and she ran out again almost directly with a dead mouse in her mouth. Sissoo, then peeping in at the empty room, saw that his cage had been torn open.

CHAPTER THE LAST.

SISSOO PUTS A STOP TO OUR HORN BLOWING.

Sissoo had done a great many hundred other clever things, when there came a knock at his door one cold, moonlight night, and he opened it to a small dancing creature, many-coloured as the rainbow, and bright as the sun, who was now leaping to the ceiling, now flickering on half a leg up and down all the walls, and who announced himself as Fol, principal male dancer at the Court of Oberon. He had come as a messenger from his Majesty. A horse was outside—the great black horse of the Man who was Fol's father—and on this Sissoo was to ride instantly to Oberon's Court that would be held in the next forest as soon as the moon stood in mid-sky.

Sissoo went, and was received with favour by King Oberon, who told him that, by universal suffrage of the Fairies, he was declared one of themselves; and that he should appoint him his chief horn-blower, if he would accept that office.

"Will you accept it?"

"Certainly, my liege lord, I will," the boy replied.

"Then you must get me out of the difficulty I am now in," said the Fairy King. "I dropped my horn in the wood some weeks ago, and it appears that it was found by a couple of owls, who have since been hooting through it in a very dreadful way. Once, they cried Mackerel through it; another time, they were making it grunt like a pig. You must get it away from them, Sissoo. I sent Puck for it; but the madcap, child as he is, only romped with them, and tricked them out in foolscaps. But I must have my horn again; I must, indeed, Sissoo, and I rely upon your cunning."

Sissoo went directly to the owls' nest, where he found the owls making big eyes over the paper on which they were scratching notes of all their new horn music. They were so busy that they did not see him come under their perch. Cunningly disguised in an old cloth cap, and a well-worn jacket and trousers, he turned up a cheerful, patient face to them, as they discovered him, and answered to their screech of "Who are you? What do you want?" with the words—

"I am the Printer's Devil, and I want Oberon's Horn."*

The two owls said no more, but gravely scrambled down the tree, and gave all that they had into his hand. Having done that, they scrambled up again to their own perch, and sitting side by side, each with his own scratching tool under his wing, there they sit solemnly expecting all that they deserve. They may get only a cold in the head, for their comfortable foolscaps have been taken back to Fairyland.

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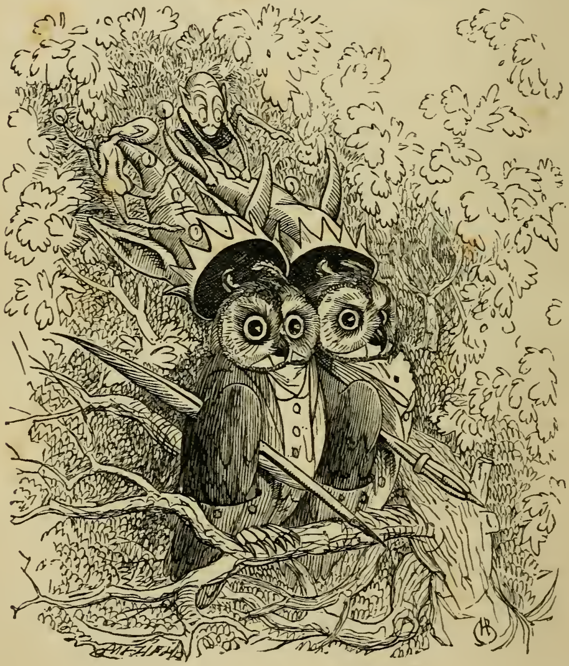
* "Oberon's Horn" was the name of one of the two little books in which these trifles first appeared, and in which this was the last story. They first appeared in 1859, 1860, and then there was an edition of the contents of the two books in one volume of "Fairy Tales," which has been for a long time out of print. Time has touched also the playful vignette at the end of the book with sadness. For a long time I have not had by my side that friend with the crayon. The genial artist, whom I knew only by the humour of his published work when I first asked that none but he might be the illustrator of my nonsense, and whom I came thus to know more nearly, I have seen on his deathbed when, after years of cheerful struggle, he had just attained material success. Unless some publisher should take the pains to gather into one book all his sketches, time still will run on, and few will know how true a man of genius died in Charles H. Bennett. Full of the simplest kindness, love of children blended with his love of art, and there was a peculiar subtlety of invention in the humour of some of his picture-books. Now and then they were set to playful stories written by himself. He was the first to sketch men so that their shadows told their characters. His whimsical "developments" and his illustrations of the characters in "The Pilgrim's Progress" include some of his happiest work. Charles Bennett's ready skill gave him earning power that he needed at a time of life when there should be preparation rather than achievement. But he studied Albert Dürer, and by constant drawing from the living model laboured for the best use of his talent. He was both humorist and poet with his pencil; and to his wife, his children, and his friends there was in all his life the charm of a playful, simple, generously steadfast nature.



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